

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in

**THE MYSTERY OF THE
SHADOW WORLD
PART II: VENOMOUS ATTACK**



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Even after exposing the fraternity for dubious activities, The Three Investigators still cannot explain all the strange happenings at Ruxton University. It is clear to them that the mystery is not solved and the so-called ‘Teumessian fox’ is still at large. Soon, a new suspect is identified. However, someone is out to stop their investigations at all costs, including unleashing a venomous attack. Then, in a most mysterious way, Jupiter is put out of action. This leaves Pete and Bob to go search for more clues.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Shadow World
Part II: Venomous Attack

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*(The Three ???: Shadow World)
Part II: Attack in the Night*

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1. Delusions of Grandeur

“Strange...” Bob Andrews stood at the window of his dormitory room, looking down on the campus. Many students were out in the warm evening sun. A few girls were picnicking on the large lawn; a young man was practising acrobatic feats; and in the shade of the pine trees, some students sat leafing through books, taking notes or engaging in animated debate.

“What’s on your mind, Bob?” Pete asked, stirring his milkshake for a good minute now. “What is it that you find strange?”

Bob turned slowly away from the window. “We probably haven’t even begun to solve the mysteries of Ruxton.” He preferred not to say out loud that they had so far seen little of the student life at Ruxton.

“In principle, though, you’re right,” Pete commented. “Why don’t you say something, Jupe?” Pete now turned to Jupiter, but the First Investigator did not respond. He had spread out a large sheet of paper on the floor and had written some names on it with a black highlighter. Now he was busily drawing arrows and lines, curling names and staring silently into the air in between.

“A homework assignment for psychology?” Pete asked. Again Jupiter did not answer him. Even when Pete bent over the work and spilled some of his milkshake on the paper, the First Investigator didn’t say a word. Without comment, he wiped the drops away with the back of his hand and continued to scribble obsessively.

A minute later he sat up straight and looked at his colleagues. “I actually need a bigger sheet of paper... and different colour pens. But for an initial overview, this should do.”

Bob left his place at the window to look at the result of Jupiter’s work.

The First Investigator cleared his throat. “Of course, this chart does not yet take into account the special incidents we have been able to register on campus in the last few days.”

“You mean the flock of birds, the howls and that strange mobile phone?” asked Bob.

“And the weird behaviour of the girls in my poetry class!” added Pete.

Jupiter nodded. “We initially associated these things with possible drug influence. But by now I’m quite sure that at least I was in my right mind when I saw that bird formation. And as for the girls from the poetry class, we couldn’t confirm the suspicion with the muffins either.”

“I already said that it is very strange!” Pete summarized. “But what are we going to do now? It’s Friday night and we deserve a little break!”

Bob felt torn. He thought of his father’s puzzling behaviour and the unexplained phenomena that Jupiter had talked about. All of this spoke in favour of continuing to investigate at all costs. But then Bob also thought about the real reason for their stay at Ruxton—they had the unique opportunity to get a taste of student life for free. This included not only the classes, of course, but also theatre performances, parties, sporting events, student assemblies and workshops.

“We’re going out!” Jupe interrupted Bob’s thoughts. “I’d like to see if the police have found anything else at Alpha Lambda Chi.”

On the footpath in front of the dormitory, they met Taylor-Jackson, who had obviously just come back from jogging.

"Without regular training, I just miss something," he explained. At least he didn't seem quite as pompous about it as he had the day before. "Tonight, though, I'm going to give my muscles a break and throw myself into the cultural life of this university instead. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is being performed in the park in front of Coleridge Hall. It's not to be missed. It's almost a must-see—"

"Please excuse me," Jupiter interrupted the enthusiastic talk. "We have something to do. If we find the time later, we certainly won't miss the theatre spectacle." He nodded briefly to Taylor-Jackson and then headed straight for the building where Alpha Lambda Chi's rooms were located.

The Three Investigators had expected to find police cars and officers on duty there, with the place cordoned off with yellow police tapes. However, when they arrived, everything looked the same as the day before.

"A large-scale operation would have been quite appropriate!" said Pete, disappointed.

Bob looked around. "Maybe the campus police have already done that."

"You came for nothing! There's nothing on tonight!" A tall, athletically built student stepped up to them. In his hands he held a stack of flyers.

"Are you a member of Alpha Lambda Chi?" Pete enquired.

The student laughed. "Do I look like one of them?"

"Far be it from us to infer a person's social environment from their appearance," Jupiter said seriously. "One can certainly succumb to a misjudgement with superficial observation and hasty conclusions."

The student looked puzzled for a moment, then grinned. "Whatever. Anyway, that's the end of the line for them! Didn't you hear?"

"What?"

"The Alphas were criminals. The police arrested seven people—including their leader."

"Really?" Jupiter acted amazed.

"Yes, really! They're supposed to have had something to do with drugs and thefts."

Jupiter continued to act surprised. "Amazing! I thought Alpha Lambda Chi was an elite fraternity!"

"They were only dreaming about that." The student waved off, accidentally dropping a few flyers. "It used to be a totally secretive alliance—a mix of highly gifted and filthy rich students. But in recent years they've landed nothing but idiots. In the end, all they had was their mysterious reputation, but that's over now. Now everyone knows that most of the alphas were criminals. And those who didn't want anything to do with the thefts and drugs will certainly keep the ball nice and low from now on."

"So just a few petty criminals. You wouldn't believe it." Jupiter looked almost disappointed.

"Anyway, they'll have other problems than organizing parties." The student bent down to pick up the flyers. Pete helped him.

"Parties?" Jupe asked.

"Yeah, man! Are you from the moon? It's Friday!"

Pete looked at a piece of the flyers in his hand. In bold block letters it said: 'PARTY AT KAPPA PI'.

"It's at our frat house," the student explained. "I can promise you that's where the best parties are! We're not petty criminals with delusions of grandeur, we're the best athletes on campus! You can meet our football aces tonight and I'm sure the entire cheerleading squad will be there too! Our Halloween parties are particularly popular. You can't get a better scary

shocker than this, but of course that's still a few weeks away. We've been planning for a long time, of course!"

"Thanks for the information," Jupiter said half-heartedly.

Pete, however, pocketed one of the flyers. "Maybe I'll see you later!"

"Well hopefully! See you!" The student jogged over to a group of girls sitting on the grass, waving his flyers. "Big party at Kappa Pi tonight!"

Bob sighed. "We haven't really got any further."

"You can't say that." Jupe sat down on a small wall. "At first we believed Alpha Lambda Chi was the key to the Teumessian fox. We saw in them a powerful and sinister fraternity. But now it turns out they may just be a couple of moderately organized lawbreakers."

"This student of Kappa Pi could be mistaken after all," Bob mused.

"But he confirmed my impression," Jupiter affirmed. He carefully touched his leg where he had been injured during fencing. The wound seemed to be healing well, but it pinched a little. "When I infiltrated the compound, Alpha Lambda Chi suddenly didn't seem so mysterious to me. It was downright ridiculously easy to become a member there—even for a student like me! And then that meeting! Apart from the masked leader, it was just a normal meeting."

"Maybe." Pete shrugged. "Nevertheless, the police should not take this case lightly. Drug peddling really don't fall under petty crime!"

"I think so too," Bob agreed. "But Jupe is obviously about something else."

"About Alpha Lambda Chi not being the key to this university's secrets at all?"

"I'd say we haven't focused our attention on the right area yet!" Jupiter stood up. "It would be very helpful if you could talk to Professor Roalstad again, Bob. Maybe he does know more than he's letting on."

"Then I must hurry!" Bob looked at his watch. "It's Friday and his office hours might already be over!"

2. A Tragic Accident

"This is Roalstad's office." Bob stopped in front of a dark wooden door. On the wall next to it was a acrylic plate with the office hours.

"Too late already!" said Pete sullenly.

Jupiter leaned forward and listened. "There's someone in there, though. You should just knock, Bob. If Roalstad wants to talk to you, Pete and I can wait for you out here in the hall."

Tentatively, Bob knocked on the door.

"We're closed!" a bright female voice called out. "The professor will be back for his students at ten o'clock on Monday."

"It's not about the course, ma'am! It's more of a... private matter."

Bob heard footsteps. Then the door opened. A slender young woman with reddish-blond hair looked at him. She had a broad snub nose and freckles. "I'm afraid Professor Roalstad has already left."

"What a shame!" Bob put on his most charming smile, which she promptly returned.

"You know, I have to call the professor later anyway. I'll be glad to give him a message then." She opened the door completely, revealing a messy office. There were coffee mugs with colourful patterns everywhere. There were stacks of books that looked as if they would topple over at any moment and shelves that bent under huge mountains of paper.

"Are you his assistant?" asked Bob.

The woman nodded. "I'm Ginger, the student assistant. I do pretty much everything here except clean up. The professor won't let me do that. Well, what should I tell him on the phone?"

"It might be better if I talk to him myself," Bob said.

Ginger hesitated for a moment. "Then I guess you'll have to come back again on Monday."

"Fine, do that then." Bob decided not to tell Ginger that he had the professor's mobile phone number.

Ginger hesitated for a moment, and then said: "Anyway, I have to lock the office now and run quickly to Copernicus Hall. I should have done that an hour ago." She grabbed an envelope from the desk.

"Is that so?" gasped Bob. "That's where I'm staying."

"Oh yeah? What's your name?"

"Bob Andrews!"

She stumbled and looked down at the envelope. "Really?"

"I can show you my driver's licence."

"No need to." The young woman pressed the letter into Bob's hand. "I was supposed to deliver it there on the professor's behalf. But since you're here anyway, it saves me the trip."

"Thank you," Bob said, dumbfounded.

"Don't mention it. I'm glad I don't have to play postwoman too. I'm late as it is. Everything is going haywire today. I'll have to skip the Moonlight Sisters' circle today."

"Moonlight Sisters?" asked Bob without much interest. He was still looking down at the envelope.

“We are a group of female students. It’s about spiritual creativity experiences and magic in everyday life. there are also some very good courses for everyone—meditation, inspiration through aromatherapy and anxiety-free breathing.”

“Let’s see if I can find time for that,” Bob said with anything but conviction.

“It’s worth it!” continued Ginger. “You can work through so much. It’s much more meaningful than running to Mrs Fernandez all the time like some students do!”

“Whoever that is,” Bob muttered and turned towards the door.

Ginger didn’t seem to notice that Bob was leaving. “She actually thinks you can explain the entire world with modern science.”

“I can’t tell,” said Bob, who didn’t know how to end the conversation. “I’ve only been in Ruxton for a few days.”

“Maria Elena Fernandez is from the Psychological Counselling Centre.”

Bob smiled kindly. “Good to know. I think I’ll be off then. I’ve got some plans too.”

“Don’t let me stop you. It’s just—”

“Bob?” came from the hallway. “We are going to be late for our appointment!”

“That’s my friend,” Bob explained with relief. “I really have to go now!” Before she could start talking again, he hurried out into the hallway. His friends looked at him eagerly.

“Thank you, Jupe!” murmured Bob to the First Investigator.

“Roalstad gave you something?” Pete immediately wanted to know.

Bob held up the letter as if to prove it.

“What are you waiting for, open it!” Pete urged.

“Not here,” Jupiter hissed softly.

Without another word, they descended the two stone staircases, left the building and headed for a bench that stood between two tall conifers. By now, the sun was low over a large building to the west of the university, bathing the campus in a reddish light.

Now, finally, Bob tore open the envelope. A small note fell out.

“It’s not much!” Pete remarked.

Bob read out in a lowered voice:

Dear Bob,

I need to talk to you. It's about the past.

Please call me at 8:30 pm! It's urgent... and be careful!

L Roalstad.

Underneath it was a phone number. It was not the one on Roalstad’s business card, but presumably his private number.

“So he does know something.” Jupiter glanced at his watch. “And we’ll find out what it’s all about in half an hour!”

Bob did not dare say that Mr Roalstad’s letter might have something to do with his father. He had hardly raised the subject with his friends so far, but it had been on his mind for the past few days. His father was hiding something from him about Ruxton University and it couldn’t be good.

“I don’t like this warning!” Pete pointed to the note. “‘Be careful!’ It almost sounds like Bob is in danger.”

Involuntarily, Bob looked around, as if someone might be sitting in the shadows between the conifers and eavesdropping on them. Then he shook off the feeling.

"We should not make any unnecessary speculations, but focus our attention on the facts," Jupiter meanwhile explained. "Fact one—we will learn something important at 8:30 pm; fact two—with the unmasking of Eggsforth III alias John Walker, we have not yet solved the mystery of Ruxton; and fact three—we haven't had dinner yet!"

"I find 'fact three' particularly interesting." Pete grinned. "We can forget all the other facts for half an hour. The little cafeteria next to the Sports Centre is serving enchiladas today!"

Although the food was great, the boys did not have the peace to enjoy it. After eating the enchiladas in record time, they hurried back to their dormitory.

When Bob unlocked the door to his room at 8:25 pm, Jupiter was panting mightily. "This can't be healthy!" He stroked first his stomach and then his injured leg.

"Come on in. You're welcome to listen," Bob said impatiently. After all, Roalstad wanted to talk to him. With trembling fingers, he took his mobile phone out of his pocket and dialled the number his instructor had given him.

Pete and Jupiter looked at him tensely. It rang a few times before a distraught female voice spoke up: "Roalstad."

"Mrs Roalstad? I'm Bob Andrews—a student of your husband's. He asked me to call him at this time today and—"

"That won't do! My husband had a serious car accident on the way home and I want to go to the hospital now!"

"Car accident?" groaned Bob.

"Yes! I can't talk now. I have to go!" The woman's voice sounded rushed. Bob thought he could hear that she was crying.

"Goodbye and all the best to your husband!" he said dazedly. Then he ended the call.

"What happened?" asked Pete.

"From Bob's reaction, I conclude that the professor had a car accident," Jupiter explained.

"Yes," Bob confirmed. "It must have happened on his way home."

Slowly he began to realize—his professor was possibly seriously injured! And to make matters worse, Bob would now not know what important thing Roalstad had wanted to tell him!

This also seemed to preoccupy Jupiter. "Roalstad has a message for you and warns you to be careful. And just before he can tell you what it's about, he has a car accident. That doesn't look like a coincidence to me!"

Pete raised both eyebrows. "You mean someone tried to stop Mr Roalstad from talking to Bob?"

"Either that or Mr Roalstad has found out something that has put him in danger," Jupe said, "for example, the identity of the Teumessian fox."

"Or what Bob's father is not telling us," Pete added.

"Whatever it is," Bob said dejectedly, "Roalstad is in hospital and we won't know what he was going to tell us for the time being. So we're just as smart as before."

"Well, at least we know that we are probably dealing with a pretty dangerous opponent," Pete pointed out. "Someone who wilfully provokes a car accident is not to be trifled with."

"The accident could theoretically also be a coincidence," Bob said. "Someone doesn't necessarily have to be behind it."

"We won't be able to sort that out here." Jupe went to the door. "Tomorrow, we will try to locate the hospital where Roalstad is. Until then, we should keep our eyes open."

Pete pulled the flyer out of his pocket. "We could go to the Kappa Pi party. We'll definitely get to talk to other students there!"

"I don't feel like going to a party at all," Bob said.

Jupiter also screwed up his face. "I'm not very interested in going to a sports party of all things either. But you're welcome to look around there."

"And what are you doing then?" Pete asked.

"I would like Bob to show me the spot where he heard the as yet unidentified howls."

Pete looked pleased. "Just the thing I don't feel like doing in the dark! Then I'll take over the pleasant part of the investigation and throw myself into the nightlife!"

3. The House of Howls

“Was it here?” Jupiter looked up at the dark façade of the building.

“I’m pretty sure.” Bob stopped in front of a wall of glass bricks. “It was a very strange mix of howls and growls.”

“And you’re sure the source of the noise was in this building?”

“I’m not quite sure. I was totally surprised at first, and before I could listen more closely, it was already quiet again.”

“Were there other students around at the time?”

Bob shook his head. “Only one girl, but she was wearing earphones and listening to music. She didn’t notice anything.”

Jupiter opened his backpack and took out a neatly folded map of the campus. He handed it to Bob. “This map should say what kind of building this is.”

While Bob studied the map in the light of a street lamp, Jupiter continued to rummage in his backpack. Then he pulled out an oblong, black case. In it lay Bob’s voice recorder. He had brought it especially for the journalism course. It was meant for recording interviews on the road, but the microphone was good enough to pick up sounds from the surroundings with the appropriate setting.

“This building is not marked,” Bob remarked in surprise.

“That can’t be.” Jupiter hung the recorder on his belt and joined his friend, who twisted and turned the map. “This area is definitely still part of the Ruxton campus!”

“This could be it.” Bob pointed to a drawing of an L-shaped building. It was a little away from the other houses, opposite a small park on the western edge of the grounds.

“That’s it,” Jupiter confirmed.

“But then it has no name and no function! All the other buildings are labelled.”

“Let’s look for the entrance,” Jupiter suggested. “Maybe there’s a sign or a plaque there that will help us.”

Slowly they circled the large building. They felt as if they were all alone on the huge campus. Only in the distance could they hear soft music and voices—a sign that Ruxton University was quite lively in other places. Here, however, they were only kept company by the crickets chirping in the dry grass. Again, Bob had the uncomfortable feeling of being watched from the shadows. But no matter how often he looked around, he could not see anyone.

“Looks kind of shabby,” Jupe thought. “The rest of the campus is in good shape. The grass areas are watered and mown regularly, the bushes are trimmed and the rubbish is cleared away. But around this building everything looks neglected.”

“No wonder!” Bob stopped. “See the warning signs there?”

“Very revealing! We are obviously dealing with a construction site here. Possibly the building was damaged in an earthquake or there were serious construction defects.”

“That must have been quite a while ago.” Bob looked at the signs. Some of them were already rusty. “Nothing’s been done here for half an eternity.”

“That doesn’t have to mean anything.” Jupiter switched on his flashlight and shone it on the building. Large graffiti stretched across the walls, many windows were smashed. “Even a

renowned private university like Ruxton depends on donations and investors. Therefore, funds are not always available for everything. In addition, large construction projects have to be approved by the city. There can be delays with some applications.”

Bob looked up at the dirty façade. “Delays? I don’t think anything will ever happen here again.”

“I’ll ask Mr Garvine tomorrow why this building is empty,” Jupiter decided. “It’s Saturday then, but as a caretaker he lives on campus.”

“I don’t quite like this Garvine,” Bob said as they continued to walk around the building. “He’s far too interested in dangerous animals in my opinion.”

Jupiter laughed softly. “You mean the poison dart frogs? Well, I must say that these colourful exotic creatures can certainly exert a certain fascination on the beholder.” Jupiter looked up at the front door. A warped sign proclaimed: ‘Danger! No Trespassing!’

Bob also stopped. “Looks like we should turn back!”

“Where’s your detective spirit, Bob?” Jupiter climbed the stairs and rattled the door.

It was locked. However, the First Investigator found an open window a few metres away. Apparently it had once been blocked with boards, but they were now lying on the ground. Without waiting for Bob, Jupiter squeezed through the window opening. He landed somewhat urgently in a gloomy corridor. A dusty beer bottle lay in one corner. The few pictures still hanging on the walls were covered with dirt and cobwebs.

“I’m sure the last cleaning crew that was here is considered lost,” Bob whispered when he had also climbed through the window. In the glow of his flashlight, two huge black spiders scurried away. “Maybe they were eaten by mutant insects!”

“Not from them, anyway. Spiders are not insects,” Jupe explained as they walked. By now they had reached the staircase through a dark corridor. The wide steps leading to the upper floor were completely covered with dust.

“Obviously no one has gone up there for a long time. I’d say we’ll take the ground floor first,” the First Investigator murmured to his friend. But before Bob could reply, the nightly silence was broken by a howl—an inhuman howl!

“What?” roared Pete. He was standing in the middle of the Kappa Pi’s party, trying to make conversation with Samantha. The fraternity house was packed to the brim with students. It was like being in the middle of a buzzing hive.

The Second Investigator was glad when Samantha directed him to a seat by the open window. It was a little quieter there and one could breathe reasonably fresh air.

“Thank you for coming here with me!” the girl exclaimed enthusiastically. “Actually, I just wanted to ask if you’d go jogging with me tomorrow!”

“A good idea. I’m in!” said Pete. “But only as long as we don’t have to talk about poetry while we’re jogging.”

“No problem.” She looked around, beaming. “This is my first student party.”

Pete decided to bring up a subject he wanted to clarify with her. “Tell me, you were suddenly acting so strangely in class the other day. Were you not feeling well then?”

“The other day in class?” Samantha seemed confused.

“Yes, you were really nice to me at first, but then your mood changed completely from one second to the next. You were suddenly really unfriendly... and for no reason at all!”

Samantha stared at the floor. “I don’t know either. It must be...” She didn’t speak any further.

“What?” Pete cautiously enquired.

“I felt so weird.”

“Nauseous? Or dizzy?”

“Not directly. More like I was away—in another place. I know I was sitting in class, but somehow I don’t know either.”

“You were in the toilet before that. Did someone offer you something there? Drugs maybe?”

Samantha snorted. “Drugs? Do I look like I’d take any of that stuff? Of course not!”

“But you have no memory of what happened?”

“It’s as if a dense fog is wafting around in my head. I try to consciously remember that moment, but I only find disjointed pieces. It’s like being jinxed.”

“Doesn’t that scare you?” asked Pete empathetically.

“In a way, yes. If I didn’t know better, I’d say it was a spiritual experience. But I don’t believe in magic. It’s—” Before Samantha could say anything more, a couple of broad-shouldered young men approached her. From their T-shirts, they were obviously members of the Ruxton Rangers—the university’s football team.

“What are you sitting so mopey in the corner for, guys? It’s party time now!”

“Party!” repeated another football player.

A blond with particularly broad shoulders, on the other hand, stared in horror at the lemonade bottle in Samantha’s right hand. “Lemonade? Geez! We’re not in a kid’s party here! Don’t you know why fraternities were formed?”

Pete wanted to say something as witty as possible, but the football player didn’t even wait for the answer. He grinned broadly and held up his beer glass. “Because you can drink beer at their parties!”

4. A Striking Connection

The howls increased to an angry roar and echoed ghostly off the walls. Bob almost dropped his flashlight. But Jupiter, who had quickly got over the initial fright, reached for the voice recorder on his belt and switched it on. “It’s coming from the basement! Come on, Bob, we have to get closer!”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” Bob warned, but Jupiter was already on his way down with the recorder. The howls tipped over into a low rumble and then spiralled up again into a shrill screech. Then they fell silent.

Jupiter stopped at the foot of the stairs in disappointment. It was damp and cold in the basement. An unpleasant smell of mould and rot hit them. Bob felt as if they were standing in the middle of an ancient catacomb. “Let’s go back upstairs,” he said. “We don’t want the ceiling to collapse!”

“You are free to leave this place at any time,” Jupiter replied, “but I’d like to at least have a quick look around!” He shone his flashlight into a room. It was completely empty. “The howls certainly didn’t come from this room.”

Bob was now seriously concerned. “I wonder if they were people? Maybe someone needs our help!”

“Those didn’t sound like human voices.”

“It could hardly have been monsters.” Bob let out a pressed laugh.

Jupiter did not respond to the monster remark. He turned on his heel and headed for the next door. The room behind it was also empty, but smaller than the first. There were a few rusty pipes on the ceiling.

“Did you notice that the howls sounded distorted?” Jupiter wanted to know. “As if they were coming through a loudspeaker, a pipe or the ventilation shaft of an air conditioner?”

“Yes, it does,” Bob admitted. “But how does that help us?”

“Everything matters to an investigator,” Jupiter replied as he stepped back into the corridor. “But now we should look behind the rest of the doors.”

After a few metres, a somewhat narrower corridor branched off to the left. Jupe paused for a moment. “We should mark the way! Not that we’ll end up getting lost in this labyrinth.”

“Whatever.” Just like his colleagues, Bob always carried a piece of coloured chalk for such purposes. He drew a tiny green question mark on the bare concrete. “That should do it.”

They explored several rooms one after the other without finding the source of the eerie howls. Finally, Jupiter opened the last door that remained. Horrified, he jumped back and bumped into Bob.

“What is it?” gasped Bob. At the same moment, a strong, disgusting smell rose to his nose. “Yuck!” He held his sleeve in front of his face and peered into the room. It was a kind of storeroom with an old boiler. On the floor, in a brown, oily puddle, lay a dead rat.

Bob suppressed the impulse to retch. The stench still penetrated through the fabric of his sleeve. “I have to get out of here!”

“All too understandable!” Jupiter brought out with difficulty. “We’re aborting the mission. The howls don’t seem to have come from the basement!”

But Bob knew very well that the subject was not yet closed for Jupiter. Sooner or later, the First Investigator would certainly get to the bottom of the mystery of the old building.

“What idiots!” hissed Samantha. She and Pete had escaped from the football players after ten minutes and many arguments. “They were just trying to get us drunk!”

They had taken refuge on the first floor, where the party was spread over several smaller rooms. In one room, six students had made themselves comfortable on an old sofa and colourful cushions. They had lit candles and were eating biscuits. Pete recognized a couple of girls from his poetry class. Next to Alexandra and Anne sat the black-haired Corvy.

“Hi!” The girls looked up as Pete and Samantha entered. “We’re having our little private party. They’re only after beer and flat jokes down there!”

“We already noticed that,” confirmed the Second Investigator.

“We’re talking about poetry right now!” exclaimed Anne to Samantha. “To think even more creatively, we’re going to the ‘Inspiration through Aromatherapy’ group tomorrow.”

Samantha wrinkled her nose visibly. “I’m not interested in that.”

“Anyway, you smell like a whole flower shop yourself,” Alexandra said in a huff.

“I don’t need to sniff oils for my poems,” Samantha defended herself. She looked over at Pete as if expecting him to help her.

“Even my stress counsellor admits that aromatherapy and meditation can help,” Anne interjected, “and the woman is a professional.”

“You can be happy without all that stuff,” it came from Corvy. “I consider myself quite creative even without aroma classes.”

“Especially for poetry, you have to open your mind and submit to the eternal cycle of nature,” Anne continued, “but I suppose you’d rather go to Jane Austen Day at the Literary Arts Centre tomorrow and listen to stale stories!”

Pete did not get involved in the argument. Spiritual creativity techniques and stress counselling did not interest him. He wanted to find out more about the strange occurrences at the university. How could he unobtrusively approach Anne and Alexandra about their strange behaviour in class? And what about Corvy having mentioned the Teumessian fox twice in her poems.

Pete decided to approach Corvy and nodded at her appreciatively. “You write really great poems, by the way! I’m totally blown away by what you’ve recited!”

“Thank you!”

“Yes, really. The one about ‘midnight truth’ and the fox, that really intrigued me.” Pete tried hard to sound sincere. “Besides, foxes are really great animals. They live in the forest and embody nature.”

Corvy wanted to answer something, but Alexandra beat her to it: “Indeed! Foxes are very spiritual animals.”

Anne now moved closer to Pete. “But you’re also incredibly good in poetry! For a boy, that’s a masterstroke.”

“Now don’t act like that,” Samantha hissed. “The great poets I know were all male.”

“Not that old gender debate again!” sighed a boy who had looked like he was sleeping until now.

Pete, on the other hand, turned back to Corvy and put on his friendliest smile. “Now tell me more about your poems.”

“Well, it’s like this—” That was as far as she got.

Three of the football players Pete and Samantha had already met on the ground floor came into the room with some friends. “What’s going on here? Is this a slumber party or what?” asked the blond with broad shoulders.

Another tall guy turned to Alexandra and Anne. “Who invited you here? We don’t want damsels in self-knitted sackcloth! Only cool babes are allowed.” He pointed at Samantha. “Your hair is too short, but at least you have a really good figure!”

Corvy cleared her throat. “What is really relevant is that we here have an organ called the brain—something which you might want to get one day.”

“What did you say?”

“You should just leave us alone.” Pete gave the football players a dirty look.

“And who might you be?” asked the blond football player.

“Hey! We’ve already talked to you just now, haven’t we?” the tall guy remarked. “What are you doing up here with the girls?”

“That’s none of your business,” Samantha defended Pete. “He’s with me.”

“Oh yeah,” stammered another football player, barely able to stay on his feet. “And who are you supposed to be... his mummy?”

“Can you read me a bedtime story, mummy?” muttered another followed with a loud burp.

“That’s enough!” Pete jumped up.

5. Fighting in the Stairwell

Everything hurt Pete. He was cold and felt like he was lying on something hard. Slowly he opened his eyes. Everything around him was white. It took a moment for his eyes to focus on the space around him. These were tiles, white tiles.

Pete's heart began to pound. Where was he? He rubbed his aching head and realized he had an unpleasant taste in his mouth. It tasted like iron. Blood!

Wild fighting scenes haunted his mind. Had he been attacked? Had he been abducted?

It took Pete quite a while to realize that he was lying in the bathroom of his dormitory. Carefully, he sat up. The memory returned only slowly. He remembered the scenes of a party, of picking fights with the football players.

Then the door opened. "Look, there he is!" Taylor-Jackson pointed accusingly at Pete.

Jupiter stepped into the room behind him.

"The university is an academic institution," Taylor-Jackson meanwhile said. "It's about educating yourself, not having as many parties as possible." He turned on his heel and rushed out of the bathroom.

Meanwhile, Jupiter got a glass of water and handed it to the Second Investigator.

"You've got blood on your shirt!" Jupe exclaimed. "What happened, Pete?"

Dazed, Pete reported how he had taken on half the football team. He carefully grabbed his ribs. Nothing seemed to be broken, but he felt lots of bruises.

"I think I'd better get you some medication." Jupiter stood up. "I'll be right back."

Groaning, Pete also got to his feet. He glanced briefly in the mirror above the washbasin, but then quickly turned away. He looked horrible. A bruise adorned his right cheek, his lip was split open.

Faintly, Pete remembered that Samantha had brought him home. He had to use the last of his strength to stop her from treating him. When she had left, he had dragged himself into the bathroom and had probably fallen asleep there.

"I'm all right!" he called through the open door and staggered into the hallway. But no sooner had he got there than he heard strange noises. It sounded like animals at each other's throats. Startled, Pete rushed to the hallway door, which gave him a nasty headache. Fast movements did him no good in his condition.

"What's going on?" he heard Bob sleepily coming out of his room. "Who's making all that noise?"

"There's someone outside in the stairwell!" whispered Pete.

Now Bob heard the noises too. "I'd better get Jupe!"

Something heavy crashed against the door. Someone howled. It sounded like a mixture of wolf and human.

"The Teumessian fox!" Pete exclaimed.

"Excuse me?" Bob looked at him incredulously. "Are you all right, Pete? And what happened to you?"

"There is someone fighting out there!"

"I'm going out there anyway!" Bob reached for the door handle.

"Don't do it, Bob!"

But it was too late. Bob had already opened the door. A handbag flew a hair's breadth past his head.

"You disgusting witch!" yelled Kelly Madigan. Pete's girlfriend from Rocky Beach was standing in the middle of the stairwell, bleeding from her nose. She angrily tried to grab Samantha by her short hair. In retaliation, Samantha waved her arms in the air, trying to catch Kelly.

Pete stared at his girlfriend, stunned. "Goodness!"

"Don't just stand there, help me!" Kelly yelled.

"Now, come on!" Bob, who legitimately feared that Samantha would rip Kelly into bits, grabbed both girls by the arm.

"We can settle this like civilized people."

"Like civilized people?" cried Kelly angrily. "Well, tell that to this beast. She attacked me! I'm just defending myself."

Now Jupiter and Taylor-Jackson also rushed to them. The latter looked around as if he were a governess from a past century. "My goodness! What kind of rude behaviour is this? It really isn't proper... but I suppose I must expect anything with people like that."

Kelly, however, had no eyes for TJ, but stared at Pete's injured face. "What happened to you? Was it because of this crazy beast?"

"No. I... It's a long story," Pete started again. It sounded pitiful. "What are you doing here, Kel?"

Kelly wordlessly pointed to two overturned cardboard coffee cups and a soggy bag of bagels.

Pete swallowed. "You wanted to surprise me with breakfast?"

"Quite right!" Kelly gave up her struggle. "I was about to ring the bell when this witch arrived. We talked for a minute and then she attacked me." She pointed at Samantha. "Just like that, without warning!"

Samantha stared glassily into space. Then suddenly she ran her hand over her face as if she wanted to get rid of a few annoying flies. "Pete and I were at a party together last night and I wanted to see how he was doing," she said weakly. "He got beaten up there!"

"Oh, so the sports star is having fun with other girls, huh?" hissed Kelly.

"She's just—" Pete began, but Kelly didn't let him finish.

She glared at Samantha. "What did you attack me for? Tell me! Are you on drugs or something?"

"Samantha certainly doesn't take drugs," Pete said.

Kelly folded her arms. "Now you're defending this witch too!"

Taylor-Jackson looked from one to the other. "If this isn't a case for student psychological counselling." He took a deep breath and turned on his heel.

It took a long time for calm to return. Bob mopped up the coffee in the stairway while Jupiter tried to persuade Pete to report the thugs. But the Second Investigator reluctantly waved it off. He didn't want any more trouble with those guys. Besides, he had defended himself quite well and had caused a few bruises himself. So he confined himself to appeasing Kelly and finally inviting her to breakfast in the main cafeteria.

Samantha, on the other hand, sat down in the kitchenette with Jupe and Bob and had a cup of coffee poured for her. She was now back to her usual self, although a little puzzled by her extreme behaviour in the stairwell. They saw nothing more of Taylor-Jackson all morning —but that was fine with them.

After Samantha had said goodbye, Bob called Mrs Roalstad. She was curt and told Bob straightforwardly that her husband had to take care of himself and was therefore not allowed

any visitors. At least she told Bob which hospital Mr Roalstad was in after several requests.

While Bob was still on the phone, Jupiter packed up his things. He wanted to go to the caretaker as planned and ask him about the dilapidated building. Only now did it occur to him that they had completely forgotten about last night's investigation. The voice recorder was still lying on his desk where he had put it the night before.

In the past night, Jupiter had listened to the recordings a few times, but he was still undecided about what they were. Only one thing was certain for him—these sounds were not human!

But this mystery would have to wait. Without any detours, he headed for Garvine's house. He fervently hoped that the caretaker had time for him. Sure enough, Garvine was sitting in the sun in front of his house. He had set up a folding table and laid out a hearty breakfast. Next to him was one of the terrariums. Colourful frogs were jumping around in it among exotic plants.

"Well, look at that. You're becoming a regular visitor!" said the caretaker when Jupiter came up to him. He was still wearing his three-day beard and—despite the sun—his woollen cap.

"For a student, university is quite overwhelming," Jupiter explained. "You don't know where to go with all your questions."

"Well, I guess this is all a bit out of your league."

"You mean studying?"

"I mean more like university life. It's not as straightforward as everyday life at high school." Garvine placed a slice of bacon on his plate. Jupiter's mouth watered at the sight.

The caretaker continued: "I'm glad I'm only responsible for the buildings at Ruxton and don't have to go through all this academic frippery." Garvine grabbed a fork. "Let the others study until their heads are smoking and they have to run from one counselling centre to the next."

"Are you in charge of the whole campus all by yourself?" Jupiter could not take his eyes off the bacon.

"No, then I would never have time for my pets. I am the building manager here. Then there are cleaners, craftsmen and people who look after the sports facilities and the garden and park areas."

"While you're on the subject of buildings," Jupiter took the opportunity, "how come that big complex on the west side of campus isn't being renovated?"

"What big complex?"

"On one side there is a wall of dirty glass bricks. The entrance is blocked off and there are warning signs everywhere."

"Oh, you mean that building." Garvine took a big gulp of orange juice. Then he pushed the plate of bacon towards Jupiter. "You want some?"

Jupiter had to pull himself together to refuse. He didn't want to appear greedy. Besides, he had actually intended to lose some weight while at Ruxton. "No thanks, I'm... on a diet."

"Poor boy!" said Garvine sympathetically. He leaned back and squinted into the sun. "The former auditorium has been empty for a long time. The subsoil there is not suitable for a large building like that, and the foundation must have collapsed during an earthquake. In any case, parts of the building have sunk, and structural engineers have determined that there is a danger of further collapse. After that, entry was banned."

Jupiter shifted his gaze from the table to the terrarium. The sight of frogs stimulated his appetite considerably less than that of freshly fried bacon. "Why didn't they tear it down?"

"I don't know. I think the building was given to the university by some donors and they could never agree on what to do with it."

"That sounds plausible," Jupiter said.

"I don't interfere in these things." Garvine pointed to his terrarium. "Give me a place in the sun and some free time for my pets and I'm happy. When you have been here as long as I have, you stop asking questions. It's no use anyway."

When it became clear that Garvine did not want to say anything more, or possibly simply had nothing to say, Jupe thanked him and said goodbye to the caretaker. He was still a little dissatisfied. Again, he had not found out anything about the source of the strange howls.

6. *Quaesitio*

Bob Andrews admired the library room. On his last visit, he was obsessed with researching Alpha Lambda Chi and the Teumessian fox and had not looked around. This time he took his time to let the huge room take effect on him.

Bob breathed in the smell of old books, looked at the small reading tables with their old-fashioned lamps, the huge shelves and the vaulted ceiling with its wood carvings. The building looked almost like a cathedral. Here, he hoped, he would be able to discover his father's secret.

He remembered that his father had once casually mentioned that he had worked on a university newsletter—something with ‘Question’, ‘Quest’ or something like that. In fact, he found old issues of a Ruxton newsletter called *Quaesitio*. Bob had never had Latin lessons, so he had no idea what ‘Quaesitio’ meant, but the layout told him that it was about news, features and reports about the university.

Bob hurriedly flipped to the masthead. For the first few issues, the names didn’t tell him anything, but then he discovered it—his father was named among the editorial board members! More issues followed with his father’s name, eventually even as the chief editor. Then the series of issues broke off—around the time Mr Andrews had changed universities.

It was annoying that the university had not digitized the issues. There were only the old, yellowed paper copies. Bob decided to copy all the issues—even if it would cost him the whole morning.

The library had its own copy centre. Bob bought a copy card and stood at one of the unoccupied photocopiers. Then he reached for *Quaesitio* No. 1. He eagerly set about placing page after page on the machine.

When the stack in the paper edition had already grown considerably, Bob noticed that there were a few gaps. Issue 37 was immediately followed by issue 39. Numbers 42 and 46 were also missing. This could be a trivial coincidence, of course, but Bob still made a note. After all, Jupiter never got tired of pointing out that every detail could be important in a criminal case.

Jupiter met Pete in the large cafeteria next to Copernicus Hall. Kelly had gone home in the meantime.

“She’s still really annoyed!” said Pete as they pushed their trays past the food counter.

“You were just out with another girl,” Jupiter said, reaching for the pasta of the day.

“It wasn’t a date, it was investigative work!” Pete slammed a plate of jalapeño chicken on his tray. “I practically sacrificed myself for The Three Investigators.”

Jupiter handed his student’s card to the woman at the cash desk. “Well, your encounter with the football team finally made you leave the party early so you couldn’t follow the conversations any further.”

“Alexandra and Anne probably just blathered on about spiritual animals, vegan food and the primordial female force anyway.” Pete began to search frantically for his card. He rummaged through all the pockets until he finally found it. The people behind him in the

queue were already beginning to murmur impatiently. Pete blushed and quickly handed the card over the counter.

"We'll talk more back there!" whispered Jupiter after the Second Investigator had paid. "I don't want to have such conversations in the presence of others." He pulled Pete to a table that stood a little apart between some green plants. "Who knows who's listening to us."

"I wish I could have talked to Corvy longer." Pete stuffed some fries into his mouth, lost in thought. "She's not like the others."

"In what way?"

"Well, she's different—like she's from Mars or Saturn... but she's not weird or crazy."

"If she is proof of extraterrestrial life forms, this Corvy could indeed be interesting," Jupiter took a sip of lemonade. "However, since you are speaking purely symbolically, your logic doesn't quite make sense to me yet."

Pete tried to simply pass over Jupiter's stilted remarks. "She mentioned the Teumessian fox in poetry class!"

"Then you should definitely talk to her again," the First Investigator urged. "You could do it right away this afternoon."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Bob and I were able to record a number of unusual animal sounds yesterday when we went into the run-down building on the edge of the university. I'd like to submit the recording to an expert in West Hollywood."

Pete put his cutlery aside. "Where is Bob anyway?"

"He wanted to go to the library and check something out," Jupiter replied. "I guess it has something to do with his father."

"Isn't Bob taking that a bit too seriously?"

"That may be, that's because Mr Andrews seemed to be hiding something from him about Ruxton," said the First Investigator. "And it was he who first mentioned this fox, albeit secretly!"

Pete raised his eyebrows. "But that doesn't make Bob's father a criminal!"

"I didn't say that at all." Jupiter looked at his colleague thoughtfully. "But when you learn that you might not know some important things about your own parents, that is already a highly disturbing situation."

Pete had intended to talk to Corvy right after lunch. However, as he separated from Jupiter and strolled around campus alone, he remembered that he didn't know which dorm Corvy was staying in and whether she was even staying at Ruxton for the weekend. In the worst case, he would not see her again until Monday in poetry class. The Three Investigators could not wait until then. On the contrary, it was time for them to make progress with their investigation.

"Think!" the Second Investigator said aloud to himself. "Think, Pete!"

"That's always a good idea!" A student grinned at him as he passed.

Where could a student go on Saturday afternoon? In this good weather, definitely on the beach... or in one of the many parks. Maybe she met up with friends, or she went to one of those groups? Pete thought of the conversation they had had at the party. Hadn't it been about creativity techniques? No, that had been Alexandra and Anne.

Pete tried to concentrate harder. In fact, he managed to recall the conversation. Corvy had said something about literature—about a reading or something like that.

According to Pete's map of the university, the Literary Arts Centre was not even far from his current location. The Second Investigator chose a shortcut across a lawn and was already standing in the foyer ten minutes later. A large cardboard display referred to the Jane Austen Day in Rooms 1 to 3. That had to be it!

Only a week ago, the Second Investigator would never have dreamt that while on holiday in the middle of summer, he of all people would voluntarily go to an event dealing with the novels of an Englishwoman who had died long ago. It was enough that Kelly owned all the movie versions on DVD. While watching the *Pride and Prejudice* movie one evening, he had already fallen asleep after the first quarter of an hour.

Pete's gut feeling told him that this investigation would be pretty dull, but his detective pride prevailed. He opened the door to Room 1 and entered. A young woman stood at a lectern and read a passage from one of Austen's books. Pete's eyes scanned the audience. He could not see Corvy anywhere. So he turned on his heel and went over to Room 2. There was no reading there. Instead, there was a lecture. Surprised, the Second Investigator realized that he knew the speaker—it was Professor Jane Heathcliff—the literary scholar who had helped The Three Investigators in one of their previous cases.

"And that's why," she just said with fervour, "'irony' is an essential element in Austen!"

Pete wasn't really listening. His gaze slid over the rows of chairs and finally got stuck in the fourth row. Corvy was sitting there.

Pete breathed a sigh of relief. The student seemed to have come alone and the lecture hall was only half full. To the left and right of Corvy were empty seats!

He pushed his way through the row, folded down the wooden seat next to the student and sat down. She turned and looked at him, startled to register the marks of Pete's altercation with the football players. Her lips formed a silent 'ouch!'.

Pete smiled as pained as possible to emphasize his suffering, but said nothing. Jane Heathcliff, on the other hand, talked for a good half hour more about 'irony', the early 19th century and something she called 'experienced speech'. Corvy took diligent notes.

"That was really very exciting," Pete lied when Professor Heathcliff had finally finished her lecture. "... So the irony and all that."

"Are you interested in British literary history?" asked Corvy as she kept her notepad and pen.

"I guess so," Pete giddily agreed. "I think literature and stuff like that is really great... but I'm especially interested in poetry."

"I almost thought so."

"About yesterday..." the Second Investigator continued hesitantly.

"It looked painful." Corvy looked at him, not directly sympathetic, but more enquiring. "If I were you, I'd steer clear of all Kappa Pi students in the future."

"I will too," Pete replied meekly. "Because of those stupid football players, neither of us got a chance to talk any more. Shall we get something to drink and take a break or do you have to go elsewhere?"

She looked at her watch. "The next event I want to attend doesn't start for half an hour."

Side by side, they left the lecture hall, stepped out into the sunshine and headed for a small cafeteria very close to the Literary Arts Centre. Corvy bravely chose a special oriental coffee with cardamom, while the Second Investigator preferred to order a simple cocoa. Then they sat down at a small table by the window.

"I remember we talked about the fox," Pete began. Corvy did not respond, but now looked at him inscrutably. He was getting nervous. "Well, I think animals are great in poetry!" At the same moment Pete realized he was talking nonsense.

“You think animals are great in poetry?” repeated Corvy with an amused gleam in her eye.

“You don’t?” Pete suppressed an abysmal sigh.

“Pete Crenshaw!” She leaned forward so he could smell her subtle perfume. “Either this is a pretty stupid attempt to hit on me, or you’re a seeker!”

7. The Seekers

To cover his surprise, Pete hastily took a sip of cocoa. It was so hot that he burnt his chapped lower lip. He winced.

Corvy leaned back again. "So, what do you want? A date? Or some good advice?"

"What is a seeker?" Pete wanted to know.

"That's not an answer to my question. But I can tell you anyway." Corvy stirred her coffee. "Seekers want to unravel the mystery of the Teumessian fox."

"Oh yeah?" asked Pete miserably. "And you are a seeker?"

She brushed a strand of her long dark hair out of her face. "No, I'm not. I appreciate good legends, but I don't take them for truth. If I come across a melodious theme, I incorporate it into my poems, nothing more."

"And the Teumessian fox is such a theme?"

"Oh dear," Corvy said in a voice that exhibited both sympathy and amusement. "You're one of those seekers, aren't you?"

"What if I am?"

"I can't help you. I know the Greek legend, and you can look it up anywhere."

"I know that one too," Pete admitted. "The story of the Teumessian fox which could never be caught."

"Right, that's the Greek mythology version, but I mean the legend of this university. The seekers deal with it. My uncle was one of them. You should hear him talk about it."

Bob had spread the copies of *Quaesitio* on the table in their kitchenette and was looking for articles that could have come from his father. His father usually wrote under the abbreviation 'BA' which stood for 'Bill Andrews'. In fact, there was a 'BA' in *Quaesitio* too.

Bob scanned the masthead, looking for other editors with those initials. There were none. So when Bob found an article with the headline 'Conspiracy on Campus!', he jumped up in excitement.

"Bingo!" However, the initial enthusiasm did not last long. The word 'Conspiracy' was far too sensational for the rather harmless content of the article. It had nothing to do with a Teumessian fox, Alpha Lambda Chi, howling monsters or students behaving strangely—it was about the menu in the cafeteria.

Bob had already worked his way through a good number of articles when Jupe entered the room. The First Investigator did not look very pleased.

Bob looked up. "I thought you were going to see a specialist in West Hollywood after your visit to Garvine."

"That was my original plan." Jupiter went straight to the fridge and stared into it—as concentrated and tense as if the collected answers to all the questions of this universe were stored there.

Bob grinned. "If you want to hypnotize that mushroom swill of TJ's, please feel free." Jupiter closed the fridge door with a jerk. "I'm hungry."

"Frustration?"

"The bioacoustic specialist doesn't have time for me until Monday and there is no animal sound researcher here in Ruxton."

"Then we'll have to put our recording on hold until Monday." Bob opened the next issue of *Quaesito*.

"I'm going to the cafeteria for some ice cream. Do you want to come?" Jupiter asked.

"I still have some reading to do," Bob replied. Then he told Jupiter about the old newsletters from the library and the missing issues. "Unfortunately, I couldn't find any reference to the Teumessian fox so far," Bob concluded his report.

Suddenly, the First Investigator had forgotten his hunger.

"That is indeed strange!" He sat down at the table with his friend and looked at the copies. "What if the important information only appears in the issues that are missing?"

"Wouldn't that be a tremendous coincidence?" Bob wondered.

Jupiter's eyes flashed. "Not if someone has deliberately removed those very issues!"

"What does your uncle have to do with all this?" asked Pete after he had recovered from the initial surprise.

Corvy blew on her coffee and then took a careful sip. "He used to be at Ruxton. That must have really been his big time. Basically he doesn't talk about anything else. Together with his friends, he was looking for the truth back then. They must have really sensed a conspiracy around every corner. But in the end it was probably all just modern myths and legends."

Pete was a little disappointed. "Hasn't he been able to tell you anything about this Teumessian fox?"

"He did say a lot about it. However, they were rather cryptic hints." She thought for a moment, then continued: "The Teumessian fox is the keeper of secrets. He is the eternal ruler of twilight. Sometimes he is the creature without a face, other times he is a many-headed hydra. My uncle also calls him 'the shadow creature' but he never gets more specific in his descriptions."

"All right, so this fox is very mysterious and that's why you put him in your poems?"

"You've got it. I thought it was somehow appropriate to use such a mysterious and at the same time mythological motif for the poetry course. So far, no one seems to have noticed—except you."

Pete had completely forgotten his cocoa. "Do you think your uncle would talk to me?"

"Why would he do that?"

"I would have really important questions for him!"

"Because you are a seeker?"

"Yes—or no. I don't know." Pete didn't want to give too much away. On the other hand, Corvy was providing them the first real trail since Egglesforth III's arrest—the trail of the fox, so to speak. "My friends and I go to Rocky Beach High. We're only here for a short time, but we're very interested in Ruxton. We just want to get the full picture."

"My uncle would be very suspicious."

"You could at least give us his name. We'll then politely ask him, and if he refuses, we'll have to deal with it."

"His name is Eugene Emery and he lives in La Crescenta-Montrose," Corvy finally said. "That's in the greater Los Angeles area."

Pete made a note of the name. "You could also give us his address."

"So you can besiege him? Certainly not. If you are a seeker, you will either find him or you won't." She stood up. "It's been nice talking to you but now I must be on my way."

Pete thanked her for the information and then looked at her leaving. Soon her dark shock of hair had disappeared into the crowd of students. Pete was left alone in the cafeteria with a hundred questions.

8. Found It!

Since Pete really wanted to tell his colleagues about the conversation with Corvy, he ran straight to the dormitory. Scrambling up the stairs, he searched in his pockets for the apartment key. He headed for the door, pulled out the key and was taken aback. An envelope was taped to the door. It said: 'For The Three Investigators'.

Astonished, Pete grabbed the envelope, then unlocked the door. He preferred to open it together with Jupiter and Bob. After all, hardly anyone at the university knew about their detective agency.

He turned the letter over and over. The handwriting did not look familiar. When he stepped into the kitchenette, his friends were sitting at the table. Several piles of paper lay in front of them.

"We have mail!" shouted Pete.

"From the university administration?" asked Jupiter, who was just placing a closely printed sheet on a stack.

"No, from an unknown person!" Pete threw the letter on the table. "It's someone who knows about us. Strange, isn't it?"

"I told Roalstad we were investigators," Bob admitted, "but he's in hospital. Apart from that, only Taylor-Jackson knows that we call ourselves 'The Three Investigators'."

"You mean TJ has a message for us?" Pete wanted to know. "But why does he stick it on the outside of the door?"

"I don't think this letter is from our housemate!" Jupiter now interfered. He had opened the envelope and taken out a sheet of paper. "It's not secret information either."

"No?" asked Pete disappointedly.

"It's a threat." Jupiter looked serious. Then he read out:

To The Three Investigators,

Whoever looks too deeply into the shadows will be pulled down! Turn back while it is still not too late! Stop searching or you will pay dearly for your curiosity!

Pete sat down at the table with his friends. "That doesn't sound very friendly."

"We have received threats so many times," Jupiter said, "and we have always continued anyway. In this case too, I see no reason to stop the investigation."

"I can only agree with Jupe," Bob said after a moment's reflection. "If we are threatened, it can only mean that we are on the right track."

The Second Investigator was not completely convinced. "Bob, you want to know what your father was involved in back then. I can understand that, but we should still take such a warning seriously!"

"So should we!" Jupiter stood up energetically. "But first we have to go to the supermarket and buy drinks. We're out of supplies and all we have in the fridge is this mushroom-threaded weirdness of a tea."

Bob and Pete did not object. They packed up the copies and stowed them in Bob's cupboard. Together they made their way to the supermarket on the edge of the campus. Pete

finally told them about his conversation with Corvy.

"I'd love to talk to that uncle sometime!" said Jupiter. "Many legends have their origins in true events."

"Unfortunately, Corvy didn't give me the address. She said I was a seeker, and therefore I would find her uncle—or not."

"She was teasing you." Bob laughed.

When they reached the supermarket, Jupiter stopped outside the door.

"What is it?" asked Pete.

"The seeker thing sounds interesting." Jupe turned to Bob. "Especially in connection with the newsletter."

Bob shook his head. He had no idea what Jupiter was getting at. "What connection?"

"Well, the title!"

"*Quaesitio*?"

"Now you've lost me!" Pete confessed.

"I don't know what it's about either," Bob said. "As it happens, I don't know Latin."

"'Quaesitio' means search, or seeking!" explained Jupiter. "Corvy mentions seekers several times and then we find out that Bob's father, of all people, wrote for a newsletter that translates as 'search'."

"Fine," said Pete. "Then they were all looking for something... but no one found anything."

"We don't know that," Bob said.

"We should really talk to Corvy's uncle as soon as possible," Jupe decided. "La Crescenta-Montrose is not exactly huge. It should be possible to find him there."

"What is his name?" Bob wanted to know.

"Wait, I wrote it down!" Pete rummaged out a crumpled piece of paper. "Eugene Emery."

"Yes, 'EE,'" Bob said.

Pete looked at him as if he had lost his mind, but Jupiter seemed to understand what Bob was getting at. "It's an abbreviation, isn't it?"

"Yes," Bob confirmed. "Eugene Emery has been one of the editors of *Quaesitio*. Under the acronym 'EE', he co-authored several articles with my father!"

"I'd say we finally have a viable lead!" Jupiter started moving again. "We'll buy our drinks and then we'll go look for his address!"

Bob quickly went to the university library to check on the address while Pete and Jupiter took the drinks to the kitchenette. As Taylor-Jackson was sitting at the table, they didn't talk much.

It wasn't ten minutes before Bob returned with a note. "I got the address of Corvy's uncle!"

"Thank Corvy!" Pete remarked.

"What is it about?" Taylor-Jackson wanted to know.

Jupiter hesitated for a moment. Just because there was a truce between The Three Investigators and their housemate at the moment did not mean that the latter had to know everything.

"It's about sport. Nothing to do with Ruxton, though." Then he turned to Pete and Bob. "We shouldn't waste any time and leave right away."

When they were all sitting in Pete's MG shortly afterwards, Bob began to have doubts. "We can't just turn up there!"

"If we call first, Corvy's uncle will probably turn us away," Jupe said.

“Yes, from what I gather from Corvy, her uncle is a conspiracy fanatic,” Pete agreed.
“He won’t even let us on the property if we register beforehand!”

“And what do we say when we get to the front door?” Bob was not happy with the plan.
“Good afternoon, we would like to introduce you to the new doomsday insurance. We now
also protect you against attacks from outer space.” He laughed dryly. “He’ll end up chasing
us away with a shotgun.”

Jupiter did not laugh. “We will tell him the truth... but only when we are sure of getting
some clues from him.”

9. Laelaps

La Crescenta-Montrose was not far from Ruxton, but the drive took longer than expected. Pete steered his car off the Hollywood Freeway onto the Ventura Freeway, where the traffic became increasingly heavy. When they finally picked up speed, the sun was already low in the sky above the mountain range.

Pete pulled off the freeway with relief. Soon they were in a hilly residential area with smaller wooden single-family houses. The front gardens looked well-kept, but not overly neat.

“We have to turn right there!” said Bob when the MG reached a junction. A narrow road led up a slope. On both sides of the road grew gnarled olive trees and low palms.

After a few metres they reached the driveway to Eugene Emery’s house. Instead of flowers, he had planted a row of cacti and agaves. They parked directly in front of the yellow wooden house, got out and rang the bell. The sound of dogs barking furiously rang out. From the sound of it, it was several large animals. Pete exchanged a quick glance with his colleagues.

“What is it?” A strongly built man with blond curls and a moustache opened the door. He eyed the boys suspiciously. Two black dogs with pointed prick ears tried to squeeze past him.

“Dobermans!” Pete snapped.

Before the blond man could say anything back, Jupiter spoke up. “If I’m not mistaken, these are not Dobermans, but Beaucerons. They are French herding and shepherding dogs, but they can certainly be used as guard dogs.”

“That’s right!” the man said in amazement. He no longer seemed quite so dismissive, but a slight mistrust had obviously remained. “Are you from some animal welfare authority? The dogs are fine.”

“Well, no,” Jupiter replied calmly. “We have come for a completely different reason, Mr Emery.”

“I am not Emery!” the man retorted. Still he had to restrain the dogs. “I’m the lodger.”

“Is Mr Emery available then?”

“It all depends on who is asking.”

“We are fellow students of his niece Corvy.”

“Corvy Kalliope,” Pete added hopefully.

“And we have an important question,” Jupe added. “It certainly wouldn’t take long.”

The man pushed the dogs back a few steps. Then he eyed The Three Investigators again. “Fellow students of Corvy? You look pretty young to me.”

“We’re freshmen,” Bob said quickly. “Fresh out of high school.”

“And pretty freshly beaten up, I’d say!” His gaze lingered briefly on Pete’s busted lower lip and bruises. Then Emery’s lodger turned and yelled: “Euge! Someone’s looking for you!”

It was not long before a second man appeared in the hallway. Unlike the blond, he was tall and had straight black hair.

Pete realized that he was disappointed in Eugene Emery. From Corvy’s description, he had imagined a real conspiracy fanatic—with an alien T-shirt, crazy glasses and a funny hairstyle. Emery, on the other hand, could have worked at a bank or an insurance company.

He wore neither a motto shirt nor any buttons with slogans. Instead of greeting the boys, he addressed a command to the dogs. The animals reacted immediately and lay down.

“What do you want?” asked Emery coolly.

Jupiter repeated his request. He explicitly emphasized that they had spoken to Corvy and therefore had some important questions.

But Eugene Emery did not seem convinced. “Just because you know Corvy, you can’t just walk in here unannounced. So get out of here!”

Jupiter decided to put all his eggs in one basket. “It’s not just about Corvy,” he said quickly.

“Ares, Apollo, up!” Emery had hardly spoken the words when the dogs jumped up and stopped close to the boys.

“It’s also about John William Melvin Roger Andrews, one of the former editors of *Quaesito!* Perhaps you knew him simply by the name Bill?” Although he would have liked to turn on his heel and walk to the car, Jupiter did not move an inch. He tried not to pay attention to the dogs, but to keep Emery in his sights.

Mr Emery looked puzzled. “How do you know Bill?”

“He’s my father!” Bob snapped.

Emery raised an eyebrow. “Well, come to think of it, you do look like him.”

“What now, shall we shoo the boys away?” the blond asked impatiently.

“No, Vince,” Emery growled. “You can take the dogs into the living room. I’ll join you in a minute.”

“Is this about Ruxton?” asked Emery when his lodger had disappeared.

“Yes, sir,” Jupe replied.

“You come for the Teumessian fox.”

Jupiter nodded.

Emery then looked anything but happy. “I should have kept my mouth shut. It was clear Corvy wasn’t taking it seriously enough. That girl is really brave, but bravery and intelligence aren’t enough at Ruxton. You also have to know when it’s better to hold back.”

“My father keeps a very low profile when it comes to Ruxton,” Bob admitted.

“It’s better that way.” Emery pointed into the hallway. “But we shouldn’t discuss this out here. Come in.”

They entered the house with mixed feelings. It smelled faintly of dog and cigarette smoke. Although the interior was neat and clean, it seemed to The Three Investigators as if no one had taken care of the house for decades. It almost seemed as if the owners had simply left thirty years ago and had only just returned. The furniture looked unfashionable and the technical equipment was also outdated. There was a record player and a small black and white television on which a baseball game was playing.

The blond man named Vince was sitting on a brown corduroy sofa with cushions tucked into orange crocheted covers. The dogs lay panting on a rug at his feet. Another man had made himself comfortable in a leather armchair and was reading a newspaper.

Emery did not stop, however, but led The Three Investigators further through the house, which was considerably more spacious than it had appeared from the outside. “We’ll go into my office. Then we won’t disturb my lodger.”

Jupe, Pete and Bob followed Emery into a room that was a marked contrast to the rest of the house. A huge flat screen hung on one wall. There was a brand-new computer and several shelves full of DVDs.

“I need this stuff for my job,” said Emery, as if to justify the set-up. “As a movie critic, I depend on modern technology. But otherwise, this newfangled stuff doesn’t come into my

house. It's enough that the movie world has to go along with every trend, no matter how stupid."

Bob, who feared that Jupiter would immediately start a discussion with Corvy's uncle about the merits and shortcomings of contemporary movies, hurriedly spoke up: "You wrote with my father for the newsletter *Quaesitio*."

"That's right." Emery sat down behind his desk without offering The Three Investigators a seat. "We worked together for several semesters, and I found him very dedicated. Together, we went in search of mysteries and secrets of all kinds. We wanted to write red-hot reports, uncover conspiracies and change American history."

"And you actually discovered something?"

"There were some rumours at the university at the time. In some circles, people were warned about the 'shadow man'. Others called him the 'Teumessian fox'. Bill was obsessed with the subject. We jokingly called your father 'Laelaps'—like the dog in Greek myth."

"Did he talk to you about his research?" asked Bob tensely.

"When Bill was on a really explosive story, he always did it all by himself," Emery explained. "I think he wanted to write a big exposé."

"Then he didn't even hint?" Bob asked.

"Hardly. But that doesn't mean other people haven't talked about the conspiracy." Emery smiled almost raptly. "There were rumours that Ruxton had set up a secret missile base. Others reported the development of a weapon of mass destruction. There was also talk of aliens being held captive in the Beta Gamma Delta fraternity house."

"Did my father believe such rumours?" asked Bob disappointedly.

Emery looked at him sternly. "I don't know what your father believed. Personally, I don't believe in the alien version, though I do think a grand conspiracy is quite possible. The shadows hold secrets that no one can bring to light... and the master of the shadows is the Teumessian fox!"

"Do you know why my father left the university?" Bob changed the subject. "He did his Master's degree in Los Angeles and not at Ruxton."

Emery thought about it for a moment. "Bill said at the time that UCLA would offer him better opportunities. We had little contact after he transferred, but..."

The Three Investigators looked at him spellbound and waited for him to finally continue.

Emery savoured the moment to the full until he finally continued: "But I think he got too close to the fox! There were others who were searching. It didn't get to them. They say that students disappeared... and then a young man died—allegedly in an accident. I would say, however, that it was not an accident."

"Can you tell us more about it?" asked Pete.

"As students, I hope you can read. Just look it up in the archives of the newsletters. There were a few reports."

Jupiter, who had been looking around the office attentively during the conversation, pointed to a cupboard with numerous folders and standing files. "Do you happen to still have copies of your newsletter? Bob made copies for himself at the Ruxton library, but some issues were not available."

"Of course I kept them all. Do you happen to know which numbers are missing?"

Bob took his notebook out of his pocket. Then he read the respective numbers to Emery.

"Got 'em all!"

"Can I make copies?"

"I'll copy it for you." Corvy's uncle stood up and walked over to a machine that was also a fax, printer and photocopier. "Cost you fifty cents a sheet."

“No problem,” Bob said and pulled out his wallet.

“That damned fox is more than a legend,” Emery growled as he placed page after page on the copier. “Whoever or whatever he is—you should watch out!”

10. Venomous Attack

On the drive back to Ruxton, Bob leafed through the copies Mr Emery had made for him.

“So, do you find any hair-raising revelations?” asked Pete as he steered his car back onto the freeway. The sun had long since disappeared behind the mountain range and the Second Investigator had switched on the headlights.

“Nothing so far.” Bob skimmed a lengthy article and then grabbed the next sheet. He paused. “Why, that’s—”

“What’s wrong?” asked Pete and Jupiter almost simultaneously. But Bob was so engrossed in the article that he didn’t hear his friends.

“What is it about?” asked Jupiter again when Bob finally looked up.

“For the Ruxton University Science Award.”

“Don’t tell me your father won that one!” cried Pete.

“No, the award went to a whole group of students in the biochemistry department.”

“What’s so spectacular about that?” Jupiter didn’t like it when others had a head start on knowledge. He tried to interpret Bob’s expression but failed. “So, come out with it!”

“Lemuel Garvine was there then!”

“The caretaker?” asked Pete incredulously. “You’re kidding!”

“Not at all,” Bob replied. “He is shown in a photo here, together with his group... and he’s also mentioned in the text... but under the name ‘Leo Jennings’.”

“Perhaps he just looks like Garvine,” Pete suggested.

“No, it’s him,” Bob said insistently. “I’m sure it is! He’s even wearing a black cap!”

“So Garvine studied biochemistry,” Jupiter said thoughtfully. “Yet he now works as a caretaker and has changed his name.”

“Maybe you get all twisted in the head if you stay at this university too long,” Pete mused aloud.

“In an earlier issue, the nominated projects were presented.” Bob meanwhile had continued to work his way through the copies. “Each project leader was briefly interviewed, and at this point Jennings alias Garvine was mentioned again. He was an exceptional academic talent.”

“Interesting that this very information are from the issues that are missing from the library archives.”

“Here he is again!” cried Bob triumphantly. “Only in a small article, though—hardly more than a news item. This time it’s about a grant award for a project on the toxicity of tropical frog species.”

“Poison and frogs—then it must be him. That’s really exactly his hobby now. Fellas, we should definitely find out more about him!” said Jupiter firmly. “Apart from that, I would also like to take a closer look at this fatal accident that Emery reported.”

“The university library is also open on weekends,” Bob reported. “But the archives are closed on Sundays and so is the administration wing. If we want to find out more about Garvine’s student days, we’ll have to wait until Monday.”

Jupiter didn’t want to give up so quickly. “After all, we got to know a few professors from here during our past cases and made some useful contacts that way.”

"Who do we know at Ruxton?" Pete asked.

"On top of my mind, there's Professor Heathcliff in literature; Professor Barrister in anthropology; and Professor Lantine in parapsychology," Bob recalled. "Well, the university is comparatively small, but the individual professors and lecturers are not all acquainted with each other. Anyway, literature, anthropology and parapsychology don't help us."

"Not necessarily so," Jupe remarked. "It doesn't matter which department or discipline they are in. It's what they might know about the university."

"Also," Bob added, "since they are still employed by the university, there is a possibility that they might not want to tell us everything that might jeopardize their position."

"Hey," Pete remarked. "What about Professor Brewster. He has left Ruxton, so perhaps he might be able to tell us something."

Arnold Brewster was a retired ethnologist whom The Three Investigators had helped twice before. The last time they met, the professor had relocated to South Dakota to work on his book.

"Great idea," admitted the First Investigator. "Professor Brewster has been at the university long enough that I'm sure he can tell us what happened then. I'll call him anyway—we can trust him. He should be home by this time." Jupiter pulled out his mobile phone. He had saved the number of the professor in his mobile phone.

The old man was at home and picked up the phone. He was even willing to help Jupiter, but could not for the life of him remember a name.

"That was so long ago," he admitted honestly. "And I never really had anything to do with the biologists. I know there was some kind of scandal back then. But don't ask me what it was about exactly."

"Thank you anyway, sir," Jupiter said, somewhat disappointed.

"Maybe Mr Roalstad can help us!" thought Bob when Jupiter had hung up.

"Then we should go to the hospital tomorrow," decided the First Investigator.

Exhausted, but with a lot of new information, The Three Investigators arrived at Ruxton. The moon had risen and stood as a milky white orb above the campus. Thus, the trees next to the car park cast long, bizarre shadows. Bob felt that after a brief excursion into reality, he was now back in a mysterious parallel world. Although he had looked forward to his time at Ruxton, he was no longer sure he liked it here.

"Shall we do something else?" asked Pete as they walked to the dormitory in the dim light of the lamps.

Jupe shook his head. "I got a lot of texts in my psychology class that I should have read by Monday. And so far, because of our case, I haven't even started." He looked at his friends. "But maybe for research purposes you could—"

"You go take care of your texts," Pete said quickly. "I, on the other hand, am going to call Kelly to see if she's still in a bad mood."

In the middle of the night, Bob woke up. At first he thought he had had a bad dream, but then he realized that something was wrong. Something was sliding over his blanket! Without his contact lenses, he could barely make out anything in the pale moonlight. Nevertheless, one thing was perfectly clear—a shadow was slowly moving towards him.

Bob hardly dared to breathe. Now he felt the weight of something on the blanket above his legs. He blinked and then stared at the thing again. Suddenly another shock ran through him. The creature was a snake!

In general, Bob had no particular aversion to snakes. In the terrarium, he even quite liked looking at them. But as soon as the snakes were no longer behind glass, they had to be treated with caution. His bed was definitely the last place Bob wanted to encounter such an animal—no matter whether it was poisonous or not.

He toyed for a moment with the idea of groping for the light switch on his bedside table, but any movement could make the snake nervous. Besides, it was quite possible that it would attack if he switched on the light. He darkly remembered a lecture Jupiter had given him. Hadn't it also been about snakes being deaf? Could Bob safely call out to his friends? Or would he have to move too much for a scream?

The snake had not yet reached his chest. It was just resting on the blanket above his thighs. It probably wouldn't move much when he screamed. Bob just had to go for it. He summoned up all his courage and called for help. Deaf or not, the snake didn't seem to like the noise. Immediately it started moving again. For a hopeful heartbeat it looked as if it would slide off the bed, but then it changed direction and slithered across the blanket towards Bob's face.

The door flew open, the light came on. The snake hissed.

"Bob!" Pete stood in the doorway. "What is it?"

Bob did not answer. Motionless, he remained under his blanket. Now that it was bright in the room, one could see that it was a dark specimen of considerable size. Bob had never seen such a snake in California.

Pete cursed. Jupiter entered the room behind him. The First Investigator looked sleepy. "What's wrong?"

"There's a snake in this room!" Pete whispered.

Jupiter yawned. "Okay, so who's the snake?"

"A snake, I mean the animal!" hissed Pete, shaking his friend by the shoulder. "Wake up!"

Bob also thought it was high time for the First Investigator to switch on his brain. He now needed someone who had a good idea!

"My goodness!" Jupiter now exclaimed when he saw what was on Bob's blanket.

"What's all the noise about at this hour?" it was Taylor-Jackson from the hallway. He felt fierce anger rising inside him.

"Pete, go to the kitchenette and get a broom," Jupiter said quietly but insistently. Bob was relieved to see that the First Investigator was wide awake again. "And don't make any rash movements! The animal mustn't feel threatened under any circumstances, or it will bite."

Taylor-Jackson pushed past Jupiter into the room. "What are you going to do with a broom? You can catch snakes with a pillowcase or a blanket."

Jupiter tried to hold TJ back. "It can be helpful with strangler snakes, but this is apparently a poisonous snake. It can do a lot of damage even through the cover."

"How do you know that's not a strangler?" The tall boy stepped closer to the bed. "Are you a snake expert?"

"I can't stand snakes, but I've read enough to—" Jupiter continued, but TJ had already grabbed an extra blanket that lay folded beside the bed.

Pete, who had just returned with the broom, stopped, startled. "You better not do that!"

Bob also wanted Taylor-Jackson to stay out of it. The snake obviously didn't take kindly to a boy sneaking up on it with a blanket.

"TJ!" said Jupiter sharply, but at that moment the boy had already jumped at the snake!

11. Deadly Poison

The events came thick and fast—Bob screamed out, Pete cursed, Jupiter yelled, but Taylor-Jackson grabbed the snake and shouted triumphantly: “I’ve got it!”

No sooner had he spoken than he let out a cry of pain. Bob jumped out of bed, tripped over his shoes and fell lengthways. Taylor-Jackson dropped the blanket and the snake. The snake crawled away across the carpet and Pete snatched up the broom as if he could defend himself with it. “Where is it?” he shouted in panic.

“There, behind the cupboard!” Jupiter rushed to Taylor-Jackson. “It is hiding. Just make sure it doesn’t come out again.”

The housemate of The Three Investigators had sunk to the floor. He held his right hand stiffly away from him. The back of his hand was emblazoned with the animal’s bloody bite marks. “This has to be sucked out!” he gasped.

“Nothing there...” Jupiter knelt down beside TJ. “That might be done in the movies, but not in real life. What’s important is that you stay calm, don’t move much and keep your arm still.” He turned to Bob, who was still on the ground. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, I am,” Bob murmured.

“Good. Call 911,” Jupiter instructed him. “Tell them to send an ambulance and someone to catch the snake.”

“I can already feel the poison spreading inside me!” wailed Taylor-Jackson.

“Poison? A moment ago you said it was a strangler,” Pete replied, not taking his eyes off the animal. The tip of its tail peeked out from behind the cupboard, twitching.

Taylor-Jackson was breathing heavily. “We should leave the room! It could strike again at any time!”

“That’s right,” the First Investigator admitted, “but it could be dangerous to move you now. The poison will spread through your body more quickly.”

“The snake won’t stay down!” cried Pete, startled. “It’s crawling behind the cupboard!”

Bob, who had been on the phone in the hallway, came back into the room. “They’re sending a team from the university’s medical centre and an animal control officer. We’re to carry TJ carefully out of the danger zone and then seal off the room. Tell TJ to keep his arm still at all costs!”

“Come help me, Pete!” Jupiter bent down to pick Taylor-Jackson up off the floor like a raw egg.

Pete put the broom away and set about helping his friend. While Bob was still hurriedly pushing shut the window that had been half open, they managed to slowly carry the injured boy out of the room. They laid him down in the hallway and then closed the door. Taylor-Jackson had turned pale.

The Three Investigators had no choice but to wait. Pete kept glancing at the clock hanging on the wall next to the kitchenette door. The minutes passed agonisingly slowly. Then finally the siren of an ambulance sounded in the distance. Bob went downstairs and opened the door to show the emergency doctor and his team the way.

Shortly afterwards, several men ran up the stairs to the hallway. Taylor-Jackson was placed on a stretcher and given medical attention.

“Where is the rattlesnake?” asked a tall woman in uniform, carrying some kind of elongated fork and a metal rod with a loop. She was followed by a man holding a box in his arms—apparently a transport box for reptiles.

Jupiter pointed to Bob’s bedroom door. “It’s not a rattlesnake. It doesn’t seem to be a native species at all.”

“We’ll see about that,” the woman said. “Please stay here until then.”

It was not easy for the boys to stand around idly. Pete nervously stepped from one foot to the other and Bob chewed his fingernails—a bad habit he just couldn’t break.

Finally, the emergency doctor and the paramedics stood up. “We’re done.”

“Aren’t you waiting for the snake catchers?” Bob wanted to know as the paramedics carried Taylor-Jackson away.

“They have their own car and will get in touch with us as soon as the snake species is determined!”

The paramedics had already reached the forecourt downstairs when the door of Bob’s room opened again. The man was carrying the box again. Through a plastic window in the side, Jupiter could see something large and dark moving inside.

“We have it,” said the tall woman with satisfaction. “It’s actually not a native species. My guess is an Australian tiger snake, but we still have to check that carefully.”

Pete took a step away from the box. “Is this snake poisonous?”

“You bet—very dangerous, in fact. That’s why we have to hurry. The Medical Centre needs precise information in order to prescribe the right antivenom.”

When the snake and its captors had left the rooms, they sat down together in the kitchenette. Sleep was out of the question.

“An Australian species of snake,” Jupe mumbled to himself. “I wonder what it is doing in a Southern California dorm.”

“Maybe it escaped from a lab,” Bob pondered.

“Or,” Jupiter said with fury, “a certain caretaker who knows a lot about tropical reptiles and amphibians has delivered them to us free of charge.”

“But I didn’t see any snakes in Garvine’s terrariums,” Bob pointed out.

“That doesn’t say anything,” Pete interjected. “We were just in one of his rooms. Maybe he keeps alligators in the bathroom and snakes in the bedroom.”

Bob laughed wearily. “Alligators in the bathroom?”

Jupiter, on the other hand, looked concerned. “Fellas, we should urgently check whether the snake was an isolated case for us!”

“What do you mean, Jupe?” asked Pete, startled.

“If it was an attack on our detective agency, it could be that there are unpleasant surprises waiting for us in the other rooms as well!”

Pete was not at all comfortable with the idea of searching the rooms for more dangerous animals. “We shouldn’t do this alone. You saw what that snake did to TJ.”

“Pete is right!” admitted Bob. “Besides, we don’t know what to expect. If it was indeed Garvine, he could also have used poison dart frogs.”

Although they had not found any other animals, The Three Investigators were unable to sleep well for the rest of the night. The next morning, they were still very nervous.

Before breakfast, Jupiter called the Medical Centre and enquired about Taylor-Jackson. The people there were not only friendly, but also willing to give the First Investigator

information. So he returned to his two colleagues with news. "It was indeed a tiger snake—a highly venomous snake species found in the southern regions of Australia."

Pete looked questioningly at Jupiter. "Is TJ in danger?"

"No. Luckily he only got a very small amount of poison. He is already feeling better."

"Good," Pete remarked.

"After examining the animal, it is now assumed that the snake was milked shortly before," Jupe explained. "This means that someone made it bite into a jar with a membrane and secreted its venom."

"To render it harmless?" Bob wondered.

"Perhaps," Jupiter replied. "First and foremost, snakes are milked to collect the venom for scientific purposes."

"TJ was definitely lucky again that he didn't get the full load!" Pete said.

"It was a warning for us," Jupiter stated. "A thoroughly threatening warning, but not life-threatening. I would say that further investigative steps are worthwhile. Now that we know where he is, we can start with Professor Roalstad."

As Pete agreed with the First Investigator, they drove to the Maple Heights Health Centre where the professor had been taken after his accident. His condition was stable and he was already allowed to receive visitors, but he was still very weak. In order not to overwhelm him, Bob went alone to the professor's room. He was startled when he saw Mr Roalstad. He had a head bandage and was covered in bruises.

"What a surprise!" he brought out with difficulty.

"Llewellyn! Don't you try so hard. You're supposed to be resting!" A gaunt woman with strikingly coloured hair sat beside the bed. She had a stern look and it was immediately obvious that she was not used to anyone contradicting her.

"It's important, Virginia," murmured Professor Roalstad.

"Whatever you think is important!" She laughed, but it sounded anything but cheerful. Then she eyed Bob. "You're the boy who called our house, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You can talk to my husband, but don't overdo it! He had a serious accident and is on strong medication."

"I'm fine!" said Roalstad in a weak voice.

"He's still quite dazed from the medication." Mrs Roalstad stood up. "I'll be back in five minutes. You should have everything sorted out by then!" She stalked past the bed to the door, turned once more with a stern look and then left.

"Good of you to come!" Roalstad tried to smile.

Slowly Bob stepped a little closer. "Your accident was quite a scare!"

"I did want to tell you something." Roalstad took great pains to speak clearly. "I didn't want to then. I always kept quiet and I wasn't a good Laelaps. I should have..." He took a laboured breath. "I should have done something... but I'm not that brave. Maybe that's why I didn't go to a big newspaper. Life at the university seemed safer. I had a family after all."

"You're talking about the Teumessian fox, right?"

"I kept quiet then," the professor continued, "and I wanted to now, but..." He paused again for a long time. Obviously, talking was straining the professor immensely.

"I found the back issues of *Quaesitio*," Bob bridged the silence. "In them we came across the caretaker Garvine. He studied at Ruxton."

"I know," Roalstad said wanly, "until the scandal."

Bob looked nervously at the small alarm clock on the table next to the bed. Would Mrs Roalstad really come back in five minutes?

“I have to...” the professor muttered. “So... it’s about Alpha Lambda Chi. They’re—”

Bob waved off. “They were just a couple of petty criminals. The leader was arrested.”

“That’s fine, but you may not know that many years ago Garvine was involved in a scandal—”

The door opened and Mrs Roalstad hurried into the room. “That’s enough!”

“But—” Bob started, but the woman wouldn’t let him finish.

“You’re about to get your medication, Llewellyn, and the doctor wanted to check on you.”

Bob said goodbye, dejected. He could have asked his lecturer so many more questions! After all, Roalstad had mentioned a scandal that had to do with Garvine. Had the professor wanted to tell him that Leo Jennings alias Lemuel Garvine was the Teumessian fox?

12. Jupiter on His Own

As expected, Jupiter was on fire to find out more about the alleged scandal. He would have been only too happy to call a meeting with his fellow investigators. However, he had signed up for a weekend lecture.

His friends dropped him off at Ruxton after the visit to the hospital and then drove on to Rocky Beach to their headquarters. They had agreed that it was safer not to continue using the university computers for research.

The thought of all the unanswered questions occupied the First Investigator so much that he could hardly remember how he had got to the psychology department. He must have just walked across the campus like a sleepwalker. With moderate interest, he looked for the right hall, sat down in a corner and pulled out his notebook. Gradually, the room filled up with students.

Before the lecture could begin, however, a man from the university administration gave a boring speech about the wide range of special events at the weekends. He nodded to a grey-haired, nobly dressed woman who looked familiar to Jupiter. She stepped up to the lectern and thanked the previous speaker. Jupiter sat up and decided to concentrate only on the lecture, but it still didn't seem to start.

The woman behind the microphone did not seem to have anything to do with the psychology department, but with the funding of special projects. Only now did the First Investigator realize that it was Francine Breckenridge, the sponsor of the special programme for Rocky Beach High School students. She was talking about another lecture hall that was now in the planning stage and about a support programme for particularly gifted students. It sounded as if she had plenty of money and was just waiting to distribute it around the university with open arms. No wonder the man from the administration listened to her with shining eyes. Finally, Mrs Breckenridge stepped away from the lectern to loud applause.

Then, a small, roundish woman stepped up to the microphone and introduced herself as Maria Elena Fernandez. The contrast with Mrs Breckenridge could not have been greater. Mrs Fernandez looked like the Mexican mother from the advertisement for Gonzales tortillas. She wore a colourful printed linen dress and shiny bangles. Most striking were her earrings—blue wooden birds that swung back and forth with every movement.

“Thank you, Mrs Breckenridge,” she said in a low voice. She gestured towards the nobly dressed sponsor who had just taken a seat next to her assistant. “I am delighted that this special lecture on conditioning and key stimuli has been made possible for us.”

After the first few minutes, Jupiter had already completely forgotten about the case. He was very interested in the lecture and Maria Elena Fernandez was an excellent lecturer.

“Great!” said one student when the lecture was over after three quarters of an hour. “I could have listened for another two hours!”

“Fernandez is a luminary in her field!” said a young man, “yet she looks like a cleaning lady!”

“Apparently there are men who fancy her. I heard that she is having an affair with a married professor!”

The First Investigator did not find the conversation of his fellow students particularly interesting. Maria Elena Fernandez's private life was none of their business. Instead, he thought about the strange incidents that had occurred in Pete's poetry class.

According to Pete, Anne and Alexandra had behaved as if they were remotely controlled. Samantha's unusual reactions also suggested that she had been manipulated in some way. The rotund psychologist could possibly explain these phenomena to him.

But he had to be careful. Every employee of Ruxton University was a suspect in this case. He wondered whether he shouldn't turn to Mrs Fernandez instead. The opportunity was good—the psychologist was standing all alone at a vending machine buying a soft drink.

Hesitantly, Jupiter approached her. "I was just in your lecture."

"Fine," she said curtly without looking up. The drinks machine made a loud noise and a plastic bottle of lemonade fell into the dispensing tray.

"I have some questions," Jupiter started again.

"Is it urgent?" She bent down and picked up the bottle. "If not, please come to look for me during office hours next week."

"That won't work. I'm only here for a short time as I usually go to Rocky Beach High. Now I'm one of the students doing the special programme."

"Oh, the Breckenridge programme." She looked up and eyed him with her big brown eyes. "You wouldn't be Bob Andrews by any chance?"

Jupiter almost winced at the mention of the name. "How do you know him?"

"A good friend mentioned him."

"Well, I'm not Bob. My name is Jupiter Jones."

"Well, Jupiter Jones, what do you want to know?"

"Who mentioned Bob?"

She smiled. "I thought you had questions about my work, not about my friends and acquaintances."

"I have both," Jupe admitted.

"Because you're an investigator!" Maria Elena Fernandez looked him straight in the eye.

Jupiter would have liked to sink into the ground. How had the woman been able to see through him so quickly? Or was the work of The Three Investigators at Ruxton University now little more than an open secret?

Maria Elena Fernandez took a step closer to Jupiter. "We shouldn't be talking here. You overheard what happened to Professor Roalstad!"

The First Investigator only nodded.

"Meet me in fifteen minutes at the car park in front of the administration building." With these words she turned and walked away.

Jupiter was left baffled. Although he usually thought that he was a good judge of character, but this time, he could not make sense of the lecturer. The First Investigator decided to text Pete and Bob and then meet Mrs Fernandez.

Fifteen minutes later, Jupiter arrived at the car park. Maria Elena Fernandez was already waiting, leaning against a small yellow car.

"Nice of you to take the time, Mrs Fernandez."

"Call me Maria Elena." The plump woman smiled good-naturedly and opened the driver's door. "We're going to my place."

The First Investigator stopped. It went against his principles to simply get into a stranger's car—and a lecturer inviting him to her home was more than unusual. On the other hand, he was burning with curiosity to know what Maria Elena had to tell him. So he finally decided to go along after all.

No sooner had he sat down and closed the door than the lecturer started her car and stepped energetically on the accelerator. She drove just over the speed limit out of the city towards the Pacific. During the drive on the coastal road, she did not speak a word to Jupiter, but loudly insulted every other motorist in Spanish. Jupiter looked out at the sea, glistening in the sun. Inconspicuously, he felt for his mobile phone. It was in his right trouser pocket.

“We’re here!” Maria Elena snapped him out of his thoughts. She braked in front of a driveway that led directly off the coastal road. Here there were posh beach houses built against the cliff. As Jupiter knew, from there one had a great view over the beach and the Pacific.

Maria Elena’s house was not large, but it had a wide patio that surrounded the house on three sides. Jupiter followed the lecturer inside. She went straight into a brightly lit living room with huge window panes. There were two comfortable sofas, a low coffee table and a narrow kitchen separated from the living area by a counter.

“I’ll make us something to drink. Why don’t you sit down?” The lecturer walked over to a tall fridge. “Iced tea?”

“Sure, thanks.” Jupiter took a seat on one of the two sofas. “Can we talk openly now?”

“Please, go ahead.” Maria Elena threw ice cubes into two tall glasses.

“How do you know about Bob Andrews? What makes you think I could be an investigator? Actually, I’m just a student at Rocky Beach High School.”

Maria Elena poured golden brown liquid onto the ice. “I’m friends with Llewellyn Roalstad.” She turned to Jupiter. “Only friends! I know there are rumours to the contrary.”

“Those rumours are none of my business,” Jupiter replied.

“Llewellyn confided in me. He was on the trail of something important. He wanted to help your friend Bob and give him some information, but he didn’t dare at first. I then gave him a good talking to.” Maria Elena came out of the kitchen corner and held out a glass to Jupiter. The ice cubes tinkled softly.

“Bob did not manage to speak to Professor Roalstad,” Jupe said.

“I know. Llewellyn had an accident.”

“But you know what he was going to tell Bob?” Jupiter sipped his iced tea.

“How do I know I can trust you?” asked Maria Elena. Her big eyes narrowed for a moment.

“You deal scientifically with human nature,” Jupiter said. “I hope that you can conclude from my behaviour, my facial expressions and my questions that I have no dishonest intentions.”

She dropped onto the opposite sofa. “Of course there are signs when someone is lying... but you can never be completely sure.”

“Just as I cannot be sure that you are not lying, Maria Elena.”

“Then we are faced with a difficult situation. We both want to help Llewellyn bring the truth to light, but we don’t trust each other.”

“Did he talk to you about the Teumessian fox?” Jupiter ventured a step forward.

“No.” She took a sip of her iced tea without taking her eyes off him. “That’s nothing more than a silly legend told behind closed doors by generations of students. The Teumessian fox is the Yeti of Ruxton, so to speak. It is just a myth.”

“If Roalstad didn’t want to talk to Bob about the fox, what would it be about?” Jupe enquired.

“For example, about Lemuel Garvine.”

“What do you know about him?”

"He has been a caretaker at the university for many years," Mrs Fernandez said, "but hardly anyone knows that he himself was once a student at Ruxton."

"We already know that," Jupiter said, slowly regaining his self-confidence.

She raised an eyebrow in surprise, but said nothing. So after a short pause, Jupiter continued talking: "Was he involved in the scandal at the time?"

"I only know the facts at second hand, unfortunately. Llewellyn told me about it." She leaned forward. "Garvine went by a different name at the time, but I don't know it. He had already graduated and was working on science projects as a graduate student. He was doing studies on animal poisons and investigating different species. Another student, who was also very ambitious, kept getting in his way. The two of them were virtually engaged in a research duel."

She stirred in the glass with her straw. Then finally she averted her eyes from Jupiter and looked out of the window. "As far as I know, it was about some kind of scholarships at that time... but in the end the projects did not come to fruition. Garvine's competitor was found dead in the lab one morning. Cause of death—poisoning by amphibian toxin... frog poison!"

13. Caretaker Under Suspicion

“The poison dart frogs!” Jupiter exclaimed.

“That’s right. Soon Garvine was investigated for murder. He was remanded in custody and the project was stopped. After that, nothing was heard of him for a long time. At some point he resurfaced as Lemuel Garvine and became a caretaker.”

Jupiter thought for a moment. Then he said: “Am I right in thinking that Professor Roalstad suspects the caretaker? Could it be that Garvine is behind the strange happenings at the university?”

She nodded so vigorously that her blue bird earrings swung back and forth. “That’s what it looks like.”

“Then why did he point Bob to the Alpha Lambda Chi fraternity to begin with? They have nothing to do with Garvine.”

“No, the Alphas are really nothing more than a bunch of students who think they are very important. Just last week the police arrested a couple of them. It was probably for stealing or something. I don’t know what Llewellyn brought them up for, of all things.” She shrugged.

“Could it be that Garvine is using empty rooms for his experiments—for example, in the dilapidated building on the western edge of campus?”

“Why there?” asked Maria Elena Fernandez doubtfully. “That old box is in danger of collapsing.”

“That is precisely why he could do research there undisturbed.”

“I don’t know. Every now and then students sneak into the basement. I think they have secret Halloween parties there—with spooky stuff and everything.”

Jupe wondered if he and Bob might have caught a sound test for a spooky party. Halloween was still a while away. Nevertheless, the student from Kappa Pi had already said something about party preparations.

The First Investigator took another sip of his iced tea. If the howls had been nothing more than a sound test for a party, at least one mystery of the university had been solved. He was almost a little disappointed.

“You wanted to talk to me about something else, didn’t you?” Maria Elena Fernandez snapped him out of his thoughts.

“Quite right,” Jupiter admitted. “It’s about behaviour modification.”

Maria Elena looked at him promptly. “Well, get on with it!”

“I still can’t believe you just went along for the ride, Jupe!” said Pete reproachfully. The Three Investigators were sitting on a park bench near their dormitory, eating burgers and fries they had picked up at a snack bar. Jupiter had just told his friends about the visit to Maria Elena Fernandez.

“I had to weigh the benefits against the dangers,” he replied calmly.

“At least Mrs Fernandez seems to have been telling the truth,” Bob interjected. “We didn’t exactly find out much about Garvine’s past on the Internet, but what we have is consistent with what you told us.”

“As Leo Jennings, he was working on his PhD at Ruxton. After the death of his fellow student, he stood trial as a murder suspect. The case was eventually dropped for lack of evidence, but his project was terminated with immediate effect. My guess is that he was de-registered and not allowed to continue research at Ruxton.”

“I’ll bet the rest of my burger that Garvine is now continuing his experiments,” Pete said eagerly. “As a caretaker, I’m sure he has access to the labs and can get hold of scientific information.”

“The only question is what this has to do with the strange happenings in Ruxton,” Bob said.

Jupiter wiped his hands on a napkin. Then he reached into his backpack. “I made some more notes on the bus ride here from Malibu.” He held out a pad to his friends. On it was written:

- Flock of birds with unnatural behaviour (unexplained)*
- Animal howls in an abandoned building (Halloween preparations?)*
- Students behave as if under hypnosis (unexplained)*
- Students suddenly become aggressive (unexplained)*
- Futuristic mobile phone (unexplained)*
- Snake in the dorm (threat from Garvine?)*

“I would imagine that Garvine is the key to these unresolved issues. The flock of birds has appeared over his house. So it could possibly be another experiment of his.”

Pete gobbled up the rest of his burger, then asked: “And what about the freaky girls?”

“I lack the expertise to define more precisely the effect of poisons from the animal kingdom, but I could imagine that one can produce substances from the poison of snakes or frogs that have a hallucinogenic effect.”

“And then sold as drugs?” Pete wondered.

“That would be quite conceivable.”

“And the mobile phone? How does that fit in with the rest?” Bob asked.

“Unfortunately, this part of our questions has not yet become clear to me, even after my visit to Mrs Fernandez,” Jupiter admitted.

“You mean after your frivolous visit!” said Pete reprovingly. “You just go to homes of strange women. Something could have happened to you otherwise. That Maria Elena could have been a chainsaw killer.”

“Or the Teumessian fox,” Bob added with amusement. “Then you would have run straight into the foxhole.”

14. Blood and Shards

The next morning was Monday, and Jupiter and Pete had to go to their classes. Only Bob's class was postponed. Professor Roalstad was still in hospital and a replacement had not yet been assigned. Bob used the time to visit the bioacoustic specialist in West Hollywood.

It was not until early afternoon that The Three Investigators met for lunch in a small cafeteria. Compared to the main cafeteria, this one was quite empty and they found a table all to themselves.

Jupiter was the last to arrive. "Sorry, fellas... I picked up another scientific paper at Fernandez's office and then I ran into Garvine on the way here. Unfortunately, he didn't engage in a lengthy conversation with me."

"What a pity. Anyway, I now know what kind of animals we heard," Bob reported. "The bioacoustic specialist was pretty sure."

"If Jupe is right, it's just an audio recording for Halloween," Pete said indifferently.

Jupiter looked serious. "That is only a guess so far. I wouldn't consider the mystery of the disused building and the animal howls solved yet."

"Let me tell you what I found out!" Bob leaned forward. "The howls are from razorbacks —you know, those feral pigs that have been running wild for generations."

"Then I hope it really was just an audio recording!" said Pete. "Razorbacks are pretty dangerous!"

"Indeed. We will therefore take care of this issue as soon as possible," Jupiter said. "But now we should focus our attention more on Garvine."

"We could shadow him this afternoon!" suggested Bob. "If he continues his experiments, we might catch him at it. With any luck, the Teumessian fox will then walk right into our trap!"

"Now that you mention it," Pete said between spoonfuls of pudding. "Corvy read out another fox poem today. I even wrote it down:"

*He lives in the shadows, he's always here;
Reigning, terrorizing, and spreading fear.
He cannot be caught, not in the least;
The fox... the monster... the Teumessian beast!*

"Very lyrical," Bob sneered. "At least it rhymes."

"I think it's pretty daring," Pete thought. "She's got some nerve talking about the Teumessian fox in public!"

"I think for her, there is more to just the legend." Jupiter stood up. "Anyway, I'll be right back."

"What are you going to do?" Pete asked.

"My nervous system reports the immediate need to micturate."

Pete raised his eyebrows. "Micturate?"

"Emptying the bladder," Bob interpreted and grinned. "You can also call it 'peeing'."

"Oh!" Pete was grinning now too. "Why can't you say it like a normal person?"

"Will you look after my backpack?" Jupe asked.

"No problem," Bob replied.

With quick steps, Jupiter disappeared into the corridor that led to the toilets.

After a minute, Pete stood up too. "This micturition thing sounds pretty good. I think I'll go to the little boys' room as well."

Bob nodded. "I'll stay with our things."

Pete went around a few tables. The toilets were to the right of the food counter.

Energetically, Pete pushed open the door to the men's toilets. He took two steps into the room and stopped, rooted to the spot. The sight that met his eyes was horrible.

The large mirror above the washbasins was smashed in the middle. Around the point of impact, cracks stretched across the surface like cobwebs. The fragments reflected a scene of horror. On the wide white rim of the sink and in one of the basins, shards lay in puddles of water and blood. Red drops ran down the porcelain. The room was empty except for the First Investigator. He stood with his back to Pete.

"Jupe?" asked Pete cautiously. His heart was beating up to his throat.

Instead of an answer, the First Investigator pressed his right hand on the mirror. He left a bloody handprint.

"You're hurt!" said Pete redundantly. Only now was he able to move again. He took a step towards Jupiter.

The First Investigator turned around slowly. His gaze was strangely blank. The Second Investigator remembered that he had once caught his friend sleepwalking. But right now, Jupiter couldn't be sleepwalking in a public toilet in broad daylight!

"The fox," Jupiter murmured in a low voice.

"What's wrong with you, Jupe?" Pete suddenly saw that the First Investigator's right palm was injured. Apparently he had hit the mirror with it.

"The blood is too loud!" Jupe hissed.

"What are you talking about?" Pete takes a step back.

"It's not the white noise. It's the blood. We have to show the dog the way. Do you have our map?"

"Do you have a fever, Jupe?" Pete asked again.

Jupiter looked up at the ceiling. "Laelaps is standing on a pile of broken glass and barking at the moon."

Pete was now convinced that he urgently needed to get help. "Good for Laelaps, but what about you?"

Behind the Second Investigator, the toilet door opened. A student with long dreadlocks came into the toilet.

Jupiter stumbled back. "Go away! The snakes ate the fire!" He raised his arms protectively in front of his face. Blood dripped from the injured hand onto the floor.

"We need a doctor!" shouted Pete.

The student stood rooted to the spot for a moment, then turned around. "I'll call for help, okay?"

"Yes, please!" Pete agreed. "And as soon as possible!"

"Like a bird!" Jupiter had lowered his arms again. Like a man possessed, he had tilted his head and walked towards his friend. "As white as snow... as red as blood!"

"Jupe! What are you talking about?"

Pete suppressed the impulse to flee from the toilet. Instead, he dodged to the side, but Jupiter followed him, raised his injured hand and patted Pete's cheek. "Good dog!"

The Second Investigator forced himself to breathe calmly. Help would be coming soon. But when the door opened another time, it was two other students. Pete sent them away,

which was surprisingly easy.

Only after what felt like an eternity did the student with the dreadlocks return and announce that he had called the emergency services. Shortly afterwards, Bob also appeared.

“What’s taking you guys so long? Did you—” He broke off in mid-sentence when he saw Jupiter.

“He’s gone mad!” said Pete in exasperation. “And he’s really nuts! But not like Samantha and the ecos.”

Jupiter looked at Bob disapprovingly. “Don’t sneak around, cat! The rats have eaten the stars.”

Before Bob could wonder about his friend’s behaviour, Jupiter blinked. He yawned, then stared at his friends. “What’s the matter? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“You’ve lost it!” Pete almost shouted.

“Me? Freak out?” Jupiter looked down at his wounded hand. “Extremely strange. I can’t remember anything.”

“You were coming here to the toilet,” Pete said.

“Right... I... I was here,” Jupe stammered, “but... but I was just about to go back to you. Uh... I remember opening the door.”

“Has anyone come in, perhaps?” Bob asked, “or did you see or hear anything?”

“Not that I know of,” Jupe muttered.

The next moment, two paramedics came into the room. “Did you call us?”

“My friend is hurt!” Pete pointed at Jupiter.

“How did he get injured?” the paramedic asked. “We were told that someone was going crazy in the toilet.”

“It was a misunderstanding!” Bob quickly explained.

“And why is that mirror smashed there then?”

“It was an accident,” Jupiter reported with presence of mind. “I slipped on a puddle of soap and must have tried to support myself on the mirror.”

“And what happened to him?” One of the men pointed at Pete.

“My injuries are older,” Pete said. “I bumped myself the other day.”

The paramedics did not seem convinced, but conscientiously examined Jupiter’s hand.

“There are splinters in it. There are also some cuts that need stitching. It’s probably better if you come with me to the Medical Centre.”

Jupiter sighed. “Whatever, I hope it won’t take long.”

“First smashing a mirror and then making demands too!” The taller of the two men looked at Jupiter disapprovingly.

The First Investigator turned to Pete and Bob. “I’d better go with them then.”

15. Search for Clues

Jupiter stood on a snowy plain that merged into snow-covered forest slopes. The sun was milky dull and low in the sky. A reddish glow over the horizon revealed that the day was drawing to a close. Someone was standing behind him, but the First Investigator could not turn around. Immobile, he stared across the plain.

“What are you waiting for?” a man’s voice asked.

“I don’t know.” He breathed in and out deeply. The air smelled of iron.

“There he comes!” said a woman’s voice.

In the last light of day, Jupiter spotted a fox. It trotted towards him through the deep snow. The yellow eyes fixed on the First Investigator.

“You are in danger!” said the woman voice behind Jupiter. “Don’t underestimate the fox! He’s fast, he scents his prey a long way off, and he can’t be tamed. To challenge this fox is fatal.”

Finally Jupiter managed to take a step. At the same moment, the fox sped up.

“Don’t turn around!” the man’s voice said ominously. But Jupiter could no longer suppress the impulse. He simply had to turn around—and looked directly into the faces of his parents. But they only stared past him in horror—directly at the place where the fox must now be.

“It’s all in front of you, but you have to draw the right conclusions,” Jupiter’s father continued, but that was as far as the voice got. The white landscape slowly dissolved.

Jupiter buried his head in his pillow. He was tired and felt shattered, as if he had had a long night. The noises outside the room did not sound familiar at all, but then it dawned on the First Investigator that he should be in his dormitory room. The only strange thing was that he couldn’t remember going to bed. He had been in the cafeteria and then...

Jupiter opened his eyes. At the same moment, an icy shock ran through him. He was not in his dormitory room at all! He had never seen the room in which he was lying in. But a quick glance was enough to tell him that it was a hospital room, and he was not lying in a bed but on a treatment couch.

Slowly the memory returned. He had been admitted to the university’s medical centre. A friendly doctor called Wilcomb had given him a pain killer and then tended to his hand. After that, he must have fallen asleep here.

With shaky legs, Jupiter got up from the bed, walked across the cold linoleum floor to the window and looked out. Outside he saw grounds reminiscent of the campus of Ruxton University. There were manicured green lawns, flower borders, a few pine and eucalyptus trees, park benches, paved paths and buildings made of bright red bricks. In the distance, he recognized one of the towers of the university library.

The door opened and a nurse came in. “You’re awake!”

“The facts speak for it,” Jupiter said. “The question is rather what I was asleep for in the first place.”

She smiled. “The doctor gave you a mild sedative for the stitches on your hand. Some people react very strongly to it and fall asleep briefly but that is nothing unusual. You didn’t sleep for long either. I was just out for a moment.”

“Can I go now?” asked Jupiter impatiently.

“Not yet. In such a case, we are obliged to take your blood. We would also ask you to have another talk with our psychologist.”

“I have an injured hand,” Jupiter objected. “There’s certainly no need for psychological counselling.”

“From what we’ve been told by the paramedics, you smashed a mirror.”

“It was an accident.”

“That’s what we’d like to check,” she said calmly but emphatically.

Finally, Jupe had no choice but to follow the nurse to a small office on the second floor. There, sitting behind an enormous desk, was none other than Maria Elena Fernandez, looking at him in amazement. “What are you doing here?”

Jupiter explained tersely that he had had an accident. He preferred to leave out the details about his memory loss. “I’m really fine!” he finally emphasized—although he had developed a headache in the meantime. “I thought you work at the Psychological Counselling Centre.”

“Normally I do, but on Monday afternoons, I cover for Professor Nora Arbiter here at the Medical Centre.”

Jupiter looked at his watch. “I’d really like to talk to you, but my friends are waiting for me and I don’t think you can cure a hand through psychotherapy.”

“I can’t stop you,” Maria Elena Fernandez said kindly, “but I would very much appreciate it if you would come to my office tomorrow afternoon.”

“I thought you’re booked until next week.”

“You have a good memory,” the lecturer replied, “but I’ll manage to carve out half an hour for you.”

Jupiter finally agreed and said goodbye to the psychologist. He left his mobile phone number at the reception so that he could be reached for any queries. His headache had become even worse in the meantime. Nevertheless, he forced himself to smile.

“It was Garvine! He gave Jupe a new kind of frog drug,” Pete said that evening, full of bitter determination.

He was sitting in the kitchenette with Bob. First Taylor-Jackson had been bitten by the snake and now Jupiter was lying in the next room with a cold flannel on his forehead.

The First Investigator had come back from the Medical Centre with a severe headache and an uncomfortably throbbing hand. He had taken some medication and then immediately lay down.

“If it was Garvine, how did he do it?” Bob opened the fridge, even though he wasn’t hungry at all. The Taylor-Jackson mushroom tea had changed colour. Apparently the mushrooms had grown. The threads of slime formed a dense mesh.

“We have to catch this guy tonight and question him!” Pete slammed his fist on the table. “Get him to tell us what he did to Jupe!”

“How are you going to get him to confess?” asked Bob doubtfully.

“By force if necessary!”

“Worst case scenario, he’ll attack you with frog venom,” Bob warned. “We have to do this smarter.”

“How?”

“One of us will search his house. We have to look for incriminating material there!”

“What if he’s at home right now? He’s probably already off work.”

Bob thought for a brief moment. "I'll call him and tell him about some urgent problem we have. For example, I could say the tap in the bathroom is broken or the air conditioning isn't working properly. As soon as he is on his way here, it's up to you!"

"Why me?"

"Because you know how to use a lock pick!" explained Bob. "There's no time to lose! I'll think of something suitable and call Garvine."

"And Jupe?"

"We'll let him sleep. You saw how upset he was," Bob said impatiently. "You'd better run off to Garvine's house—and take the camera, the voice recorder and a mobile phone with you. I'll text you as soon as I know if he's coming here."

Pete didn't argue. He picked up the equipment, said goodbye to Bob and walked across the campus at a brisk pace. Very close to Garvine's house, the Second Investigator sat down on a bench. The nearest lamp was quite a distance away so he could observe the building from the shadows without being seen himself.

"Hi! What are you doing here?"

Pete winced at being addressed so unexpectedly.

"Did I scare you?" Samantha sat down next to him. As always, she was surrounded by a cloud of perfume.

"I needed some distance," Pete said. Carefully, he peeked past Samantha. The girl covered her view of the door of the house. "I want to write a new poem and for that I really need quiet!"

"You're lying."

"How?" Pete could hardly concentrate. How was he supposed to keep an eye on the house, wait for a text message from Bob, and talk to Samantha at the same time?

"You want me to leave. It's because of your friend, that cheerleader."

"Kelly?"

"Yeah. She was pretty mad at me, wasn't she? I mean, I really attacked her, though. I don't know what was going on with me. I must have eaten or drunk something weird at the party on Friday."

At the same moment, the mobile phone buzzed in Pete's pocket. He pulled it out and looked at the display. "I really don't have time to talk about it." Again he bent down to get a better look at the house. Garvine stepped into the front yard. He adjusted his black cap and then trotted away.

"I have to go!"

"I'm coming with you!"

Desperately, Pete thought about how he could shake Samantha off. "I'm in a big hurry!"

"But just now you were sitting comfortably watching the stars!"

"It's really important!" Pete switched his mobile phone to silent mode so it wouldn't betray him.

"Do you have a new case?" Samantha now asked, her eyes shining.

"Case?" Pete looked at her in horror. "How do you know we are investigators?"

The girl laughed. "My goodness, just about everyone at Rocky Beach High knows that. So, what is it? A new case?"

The Second Investigator decided to tell the truth. "Yes, I have to go to that house over there—and I have to go now!"

"Then I'll be your lookout! I don't want you to get caught in the end."

"Whatever..." Pete growled as he climbed over the low fence that surrounded Garvine's property. "I'll leave a gap at the window upstairs. Then I'll hear you whistle a warning."

Samantha climbed over the fence after him. "Whistling is totally flashy! But I can imitate an owl really well!"

Pete doubted it, but he couldn't afford to think any further about Samantha's skills as a bird-call impersonator. Under cover of darkness, he crept up to Garvine's back door. It was locked. For Pete, however, the lock was a small matter.

"See you in a minute," he said quietly to Samantha. "You wait here!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The Second Investigator was not entirely comfortable when he entered the house. After all, it was the house of a man who had stood trial as a murder suspect. Garvine had been acquitted, but that did not mean he was harmless or that he had not committed a murder.

Pete preferred not to switch on his flashlight for the time being. As far as he could see in the twilight, he was in a room that seemed to be a storeroom. What was he supposed to be looking for? Was there anything to suggest that secret experiments were going on here?

Pete looked around. Besides a few old buckets, a rake, leather gloves and various tools, there was a garden hose, a broken terrarium and a few rolls of wire. It looked anything but suspicious, but Pete didn't expect to find anything in the first room he entered.

He crept on, into the hallway with the ugly floral wallpaper. The first door he found led into a small bathroom. A single drop of water fell straight down from the shower head and landed in the empty tub. The sound seemed unnaturally loud to Pete, just like his own footsteps.

He hurriedly examined the bathroom, then moved on to the next door. Behind it was a toilet. The light of a street lamp shone in from outside through a small window. There were magazines on a shelf next to the toilet. The Second Investigator bent down. Between a daily newspaper and a comic book entitled *Ursula, the Killer Amazon* lay the *International Journal of Toxicology*. A scientific journal! But of course that was not enough to convict Garvine. The obvious interest in a subject was not yet proof of his secret projects.

The Second Investigator turned back and crept towards the stairs. Quietly, he climbed the creaking steps.

At the top, he immediately approached the room with the terrariums. Carefully, he pushed the glass door aside. There was a strange, colourful twilight inside. The frogs' terrarium was lit by a bluish lamp. This created eerie shadows—especially when an animal moved in the glass boxes. Above the black lizards, on the other hand, the red light of the heat lamp shone. Together with the blue, the result was a play of colours that reminded Pete of the lights of a police car.

Pete remembered that he had to open a gap at a window upstairs. With a few quick steps, he was at the nearest window and pushed it up. Below, next to a gnarled tree, he could spot the outline of Samantha. If she paid close attention, Pete could concentrate entirely on the search. But it would take him a long time alone. He wished Jupe were with him. The First Investigator would have gone to work systematically and would surely have found a decisive clue in no time.

Something rustled behind Pete. He winced. Had Garvine come back without Samantha noticing? There was another rustle. As if in a trance, he turned around—and looked directly at the terrarium with the frogs.

Pete breathed a sigh of relief. As long as the animals were behind glass, they could not be dangerous to him. But then he realized that he had already lost far too much time. He had to find something, otherwise the whole action was in vain!

16. A Telltale Scent

Bob stood next to Garvine, who was kneeling and reaching into his toolbox. The caretaker grabbed a heavy pipe wrench and looked up at Bob. "Pretty weird!"

"What?" asked Bob nervously.

"It looks like someone has tampered with the pipe fitting."

"Oh really?" Bob tried hard to act surprised.

"Did you turn that pipe adapter there?"

"Me? No! Certainly not!"

Garvine stood up with his pipe wrench still in his hand. "Something's wrong here."

"Yes," Bob said hurriedly. "The water ran straight onto the floor. That's a huge waste, of course, and—"

"I'm done and I'm leaving now."

"But the fridge also does—" Bob started again.

"I'll check on that tomorrow. There's a documentary about the tropics on TV." Garvine packed up his tools, grabbed his toolbox and tapped his cap. "See you then!"

Bob thought feverishly about how he could stop Garvine without looking suspicious, but the caretaker was already at the door.

"Wait! I have some questions about Alpha Lambda Chi!"

Garvine turned around briefly. "I'll be happy to answer that tomorrow. I'm off now!"

With these words he opened the door and disappeared into the stairwell.

Bob hurriedly closed the door, got his mobile phone and typed a text message to Pete. Hopefully the Second Investigator would read it in time! Then he ran. With a bit of luck, he could still catch Garvine and engage him in a conversation!

Pete was in Garvine's bedroom by now. He looked under the bed, in the dresser and in the closet. But here as well, there was nothing to suggest any experiments.

Something rumbled in the terrarium room. This time Pete was not quite as startled. The noise had been quite loud for a mouse, but maybe they were fighting or one of the lizards had escaped from its cage and knocked something over.

The Second Investigator lifted a pile of clothes. He grinned. Besides the usual black and white trousers, there was also one with frogs printed on it. He was about to put the pile back in the dresser when the door opened. Abruptly, the Second Investigator dropped the clothes. They landed in a messy heap on the carpet.

"Pete!" Samantha came into the room.

The Second Investigator gasped. "Are you insane? I almost had a heart attack from fright! I told you to wait outside and keep watch."

"I did that! But Garvine's back! I made the owl call like a fool, but you didn't come out of the house!"

"What a bummer! I didn't hear anything!"

"Garvine is still outside by the fence," Samantha explained in a strained whisper. "Someone approached him and they're talking, but he could come into the house at any moment."

"Then we have to get out of here now!" Pete decided and pulled Samantha towards the stairs.

However, she shook her head. "We'll run straight into his arms like this!"

"Do you have a better idea?"

"I climbed through the window you opened. There's a tree right next to it. That's almost as good as a ladder."

They ran back into the terrarium room. Behind them they heard the front door open. Someone stepped into the hallway.

"Oh dear," Samantha murmured when she reached the window. "It looks much higher from here! And we can only climb down one at a time."

"Get out now!" Pete admonished, but there were already footsteps on the stairs. They would never make it out of the window and onto the tree in time!

Pete grabbed Samantha urgently by the arm and pulled her behind a curtain at the last minute. A floorboard squeaked. Someone came into the room. Then a lamp was switched on. Fortunately it was only a dim light source that stood in the other corner of the room. Pete hoped that the bulge in the curtain would not be noticed. With the dim lighting, they might be lucky.

He peeked through a small tear in the fabric. Someone was standing at the sink. Pete heard water being poured into a kettle. "Well, my pets, are you all right?" said Garvine's voice after he had put the kettle on.

For a moment, it looked as if the caretaker was about to go to the terrariums. But then he stopped and sniffed. Pete closed his eyes. He had completely forgotten this in all the excitement—Samantha smelled like a whole perfumery including a flower shop. Even someone with a cold would smell her perfume! And Garvine didn't have a cold. The caretaker started moving again, he went to the window, closed it and sniffed again. Then he tore the curtain aside with a jerk.

17. The ‘Special Obscure Situation’

Bob crept very close to Garvine’s house and looked at his mobile phone. Pete had not answered him. If he had already left the building, where was he?

Bob looked around indecisively. Should he send Pete another text message? He was dissatisfied with the investigation. They had proceeded far too uncoordinated, and he just hadn’t found any good excuses to engage Garvine in conversation for long. Jupiter would certainly have done a great job in his place, but he was in bed... and Pete was nowhere in sight.

At least Bob had tried his best to buy his friend a little more time, but the caretaker had again referred to the television programme. Besides, an irritating noise had been heard again and again directly behind the house. The Three Investigators had long used to mimic the call of the Red-bellied Flycatcher as a secret signal. But what Bob had heard had sounded more like an undead flycatcher-wolf hybrid, so it couldn’t have been Pete. Whatever it was that had called, Garvine should have heard it as well!

“I knew something was wrong here!” Garvine scowled at Pete and Samantha.

“I just wanted to show my girlfriend the frogs!” Pete defended himself.

Garvine leaned forward threateningly. “You can tell that to your grandmother! You’re spying on me, aren’t you?”

“What makes you think of that?”

“I heard that you are investigators.”

“You must have misheard. I—”

“Do you have a mobile phone with you?”

Pete hesitated. If he gave Garvine the mobile phone, he could no longer call for help. On the other hand, the man would surely search him and find the device. It was better to give it to him willingly. Resigned to fate, he took it out of his pocket and held it out to the caretaker.

“Very good,” Garvine said. “You call your friend Bob now. He’s probably still standing outside guarding the house. Tell him everything’s okay.”

“But—”

“Don’t argue with me!” growled Garvine. “You’ll do as I say or you’ll regret it! Tell Bob to ring the bell downstairs and I’ll let him in.”

In a flash, Pete thought about how to tell Bob that he was walking into a trap. Bob absolutely had to call the campus police, otherwise this situation could end badly!

“Well, do it now!” Garvine was getting impatient.

“It’s practically done already!” Pete said quickly and dialled Bob’s number, and his friend answered immediately.

“Hi, it’s Pete.”

“Where on earth are you?” Bob sounded a little reproachful, but also relieved.

“Samantha and I are with Garvine in the room upstairs. But don’t worry, everything’s fine! He’s just explaining to us what’s really going on at Ruxton University.”

“You’re kidding!”

“No,” Pete replied. “You should come in too.”

“Why?” asked Bob suspiciously.

“Mr Garvine won’t want to tell the whole story twice. You’ll be amazed! The Ruxton case is really a ‘special obscure situation’!” Pete was glad that he had come up with that phrase because the first letters of the words together was ‘SOS’. Now Pete could only hope that his friend had also understood this encrypted message. Bob probably wouldn’t expect such a creative train of thought from Pete, but it was worth a try. He said goodbye to his friend and hung up.

“Special obscure situation?” echoed Garvine as he snatched the mobile phone from Pete.

“That’s what our leader says when a case is particularly tricky.”

“You mean Jupiter Jones, who was in hospital today?”

“You must mean Jupiter Jones, whom you somehow manipulated! You were spying on us after all!”

“Of course,” Samantha added. “As a caretaker you can get in anywhere and snoop on the students!”

Garvine paid no attention to her. He continued to look at Pete. “Where is your friend?”

“I don’t know, he said he’d ring the bell in a minute!”

“Then come with me. I’m not leaving you here when I go downstairs!”

“What are you going to do with us?” asked Samantha anxiously.

“You go in there!” Garvine pointed to a tiny storeroom just outside the terrarium room.

“You want to lock us up?” Pete asked.

“That’s right!” Garvine gave Pete a shove.

“I can’t do this!” whined Samantha. “I panic in small spaces!”

Pete seized the moment when Garvine turned his attention to the girl. With one hand he switched on the voice recorder that was in his back right trouser pocket. Maybe he could get Garvine to confess.

“You’ve been watching all of us, haven’t you? You knew what was going on in Ruxton all along!” he shouted as Garvine tried to push him into the storeroom. “We found the missing issues of *Quaesitio*. We know who you are—Leo Jennings!”

Garvine stopped in mid-motion as if suddenly frozen to ice. “What do you know about that time?”

“Practically everything! We know about the frog poison, the death, the trial, your attempts and the experiments you do. That wacky exploding mobile phone was yours too, wasn’t it? It was right outside your house.”

“You’re a clever fellow,” Garvine said tonelessly. “The mobile phone was really mine... but I’ll say something about that later. I’ll take care of your friend first! So leave your bags out here and then get in there!” He gave Pete another shove and slammed the door. The Second Investigator could hear the key being turned from outside.

“Why did you tell him all that?” asked Samantha in a panic when they heard Garvine’s footsteps going down the stairs. “Now we’re a real threat to him after all! He’ll get us and Bob out of the way!”

“I had to risk it,” Pete replied. “I needed to record what he said!” He scanned the door in the dark. Garvine had not searched him and therefore knew nothing of the lock pick set and voice recorder. “I’m going to try to open this door. Do you have a mobile phone or a small light with you? Anything to shine with?”

“Unfortunately, no. It’s all in my bag outside.”

“I’m sure I can work in the dark.” Pete pulled out his lock picks.

“Hurry up, he’ll be back in a minute!” Samantha sounded as if she would start crying at any moment.

Pete couldn't help thinking of Kelly. She could be extremely bitchy and jealous, but when it came down to it, she was brave. Apart from that, Kelly didn't use such intrusive perfume. Pete felt quite woozy. He was about to ask Samantha to move away from him a little when the doorbell rang.

18. A Fox in a Trap?

“That must be Bob!” Samantha exclaimed.

“Probably.” Pete continued to work on the lock. Now every second mattered. A few floorboards creaked in the terrarium room.

“He’s back!” whimpered Samantha, but Pete was sure that Garvine would never have made it from the door up to the terrarium room upstairs so quickly. Strangely, footsteps now sounded on the stairs. The glass door was pushed aside. Then they heard a dull thud. It sounded as if two people were having a scuffle.

Pete turned the lock pick one last time and the door burst open. In the light from the terrarium room, he saw Bob, who had grabbed Garvine by the shoulders. The Second Investigator came to his friend’s aid. Together they managed to wrestle the caretaker to the ground.

“You’ll regret this!” gasped Garvine, his face red.

“Why don’t you tell that to the police?” Bob said.

“Gladly! Don’t forget—you’re trespassing here. This is a private house! I will report you instead! You will not get off scot-free!”

“The question is, who is more likely to be believed?” Bob snorted. “Three investigators who have a long-standing collaboration with the Rocky Beach Police Department, or a man working under a false name who has already been tried on suspicion of murder?”

Pete nodded in agreement. “Besides, we have incriminating material! When you locked me and Samantha in the storeroom, I recorded what you said with a voice recorder.”

“I’d say we call the campus police right now.” Samantha bent down, picked up her handbag and took out a small mobile phone.

“No!” Garvine struggled so much that Pete and Bob had to push him to the floor with all their strength. “You rotten snoopers! I’ll have you for trespassing! You’ll be hearing from my lawyer!”

Pete gave Bob a worried look, but Bob just stared angrily at Garvine. “You did an experiment on our friend! You put a snake in my room! And you got Professor Roalstad out of the way before he could reveal anything. I think you will need your lawyer much more urgently for your own defence.”

“Oh yeah, is that what you think? But I would also have something to say about that! You—”

“Not now!” hissed Samantha. She put her mobile phone to her ear. A moment later, someone at the campus police station answered and Samantha explained what it was about.

No sooner had she hung up than Garvine tore himself away. Pete and Bob, not expecting another escape attempt, reacted a moment too late. The caretaker ran out of the room, out onto the stairs. Immediately Pete sprinted after him. He caught the man halfway.

“Let me go!” Garvine tried to push Pete away. They both stumbled on the dark stairs. Before they could hold on, they tumbled down the last steps. Pete hit his head against the wall, bounced his hip on a step and finally landed ungracefully on the cold floor of the hallway. Everything hurt him. He groaned. Hadn’t he received enough bruises in the investigation of this case?

"Is everything all right?" Bob and Samantha came hurriedly down the stairs.

"I'm still alive," Pete murmured.

"And Garvine?"

Only now did Pete turn to the man. The caretaker struggled to his feet but the Second Investigator was quicker. He had already grabbed the slightly dazed Garvine and pushed him back onto the floor.

The campus police were not long in coming. However, the officers did not even think of arresting the caretaker. Instead, Pete, Bob and Samantha had to go to the station as suspected burglars. Garvine himself only came along as a witness. While he gave his statement, the three Rocky Beach students were questioned in another room by a friendly officer named Hogart.

Before Bob and Pete could say anything, Samantha burst into tears. "I'm a minor and I won't say anything without my mother!"

"We have to inform your parents anyway!" the officer assured.

"In our particular case, however, it would make more sense to call Inspector Cotta in Rocky Beach," Bob spoke up.

Inspector Cotta was The Three Investigators' main contact at the Rocky Beach Police Department. With his help, they had been able to successfully solve many cases in the past. In turn, the three had often provided information for the police to solve criminal activities.

"He can confirm for you that we are junior investigators working on a case. The entry to Mr Garvine's house was certainly not a good idea, but we wanted to prove that he poisoned our friend!"

"We were just a bit overzealous!" added Pete, "but Garvine is the real criminal."

Hogart laughed. "Okay."

"We are not burglars!" the Second Investigator affirmed. "Please call the Rocky Beach Police Department. Then everything will be cleared up!"

Officer Hogart thought about it for a moment, but then left the room to talk to Inspector Cotta on the phone. The conversation lasted quite a while. Pete and Bob exchanged nervous glances while Samantha was still sobbing quietly. When the officer came back into the room, the three of them looked at him tensely.

"Inspector Cotta told me to tell you that he is getting fed up with putting in good words for you," Hogart said and grinned, "but he has confirmed to me that you are investigators. Quite successful ones, in fact."

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. "Then you should definitely listen to what we found out, sir."

"I'm not going to miss that." Hogart was still grinning.

Bob then told in detail about the caretaker's false identity, the secret experiments, the suspected attempt on Professor Roalstad's life, Jupiter's seizure and the snake in Bob's room.

"That sounds so crazy it could be true." The officer patiently typed everything into the computer. "We will check all this out. Please come back here during the day tomorrow."

"We're allowed to go?" Samantha wanted to know.

"Yes, but don't get caught in any unlawful activities again!"

When they were outside again with relief, strolling side by side in the direction of the dormitory, a question occurred to Pete. "Bob, how could you ring the bell and get into the Garvine house at the same time?"

"With a trick," Bob said absent-mindedly.

"Come on, tell me," Pete followed up.

"I had a strong feeling after your call that I was being lured into a trap. The words 'special obscure situation' made me think."

"The first letters make 'SOS'," Pete said proudly.

"Yes, I also noticed that, so I had to come up with a plan in a hurry. I saw that a window upstairs was open and it was quite easy to climb the tree next to it. So I waited until a student came by. I told him something about a prank I would have to do as an entrance test for a fraternity and asked him to help me. He was supposed to ring the bell and then run away quickly while I climbed the tree on the other side of the house. For ten dollars, he did it."

Samantha looked at Bob in admiration. "That really saved us!"

"I'd say the case is finally solved and we can continue studying in peace!" Pete looked pleased. "Jupe would be impressed!"

"Well, I don't know if that's all there is to it." Bob looked around uneasily. "What if we missed something?"

"What? Garvine was the Teumessian fox! Probably even your father suspected that back then and just couldn't get him convicted!"

"But Garvine was going to tell us something before the police came, it just never happened."

"He probably just wanted to tell us some lies," Pete replied, "and when the situation got dicey, he fled. That's as good as a confession."

"Pete is right. It would be better if the police took care of the case," Samantha said. "I have to go. I haven't finished my poem for tomorrow. Besides, I wanted to discuss something with that Corvy girl tonight for my literature class, but she took off. Now I have to do all the work alone."

"Took off?" asked Pete in amazement.

"Yes, I'm telling you. I don't know where she is now, but she stood me up. Someone in her dorm said she had moved out. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing. I think she's just lost it!"

"Strange," thought Bob. "Who would just leave university at the start of a semester like that?"

"It's strange, all right," Pete remarked, "but certainly not a new case for The Three Investigators."

Samantha smiled at Pete. "See you tomorrow! I'm really looking forward to your poem about the 'forces of nature'."

"Me too," Pete said dryly.

"Fine!" The girl turned and walked away.

Bob and Pete watched her walk away in the direction of her dormitory.

"Case solved!" Pete finally said.

*To be continued in
Part III: The Dark Force.*